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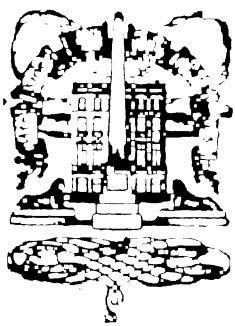
THE FRUITFUL VINE

NOVEL

BY

ROBERT HICHENS



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T. FISHER UNWIN
LONDON: ADELPHI TERRACE
1911

FIRST IMPRESSION, September 1911
SECOND " "
THIRD " October

G 2340 /RP/04

22.4.85

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THE FRUITFUL VINE

CHAPTER I

ROME lay in the embrace of a golden afternoon, one of those clear afternoons of autumn which hold no foretaste of winter sadness, but which are mellow and soft, which suggest to the mind the glory of harvest, the merriment and opulence of the vintage, when the sons of men take from the earth her good gifts with joy and a careless thankfulness. The close rows of the ilexes in the Borghese Gardens threw their twilight upon the paths about the Piazza di Siena. The tall pine trees showed their round dark heads on the crest of the hill by the Porta Pinciana. But in the Giardino del Lago, near the temple of Æsculapius, the red and the golden leaves were falling along the edge of the opaque water, and the black figures of the students from the theological colleges, who haunt this quiet enclosure, coming and going among the trees, or bending motionless over their books of devotion in sheltered places, were relieved against a delicate wonder of colour that touched them with romance. Upon the circular riding track that girdles the grassy open space where games are played by the students and youths of Rome, officers in uniform cantered by, sitting squarely on their horses. Workmen in soft hats, their jackets loosely tied by the sleeves round their brawny necks, went past smoking Toscanas, and talking loudly. Strangers, seeking the intimate spell of the Gracious City, dreamed on seats beneath the pines near the Vaccheria. Here and there a painter was reverently at work, helped perhaps by the murmur of water falling into the mossy basin of an antique fountain. Here and there a gay bicyclist spun by, and the purr of a motor-car, breasting the hill from the Piazza del Popolo, struck a modern

note in these Pagan gardens. And the light voices of children thrilled through the languorous air and rang out in the sunshine.

For it was the children's hour in the Villa Borghese.

The stalwart nurses in their flowing ribbons, with immense gleaming pins, almost like daggers, stuck through their head-dresses, walked proudly, carrying, or wheeling, their charges, the dark-eyed *bimbi* of Rome. Older children, clasping dolls, or carelessly cherishing as accustomed possessions, beloved but thoroughly known, large Teddy bears, walked or skipped blithely along the paths, crying out like birds to each other, darting to and fro as if full of mysterious purpose not to be divined by their elders, or gazing at the horsemen and motors with a concentration behind which lay virginal tracts of desire, of dewy hopes, of bright, springing imaginations. Some boys were playing football, not cleverly, but lustily, exercising their limbs with a riotous joy, and filling the air with their shouts. Many young girls, with bright, watchful eyes and demure lips, moved slowly with their English or German governesses towards the Pincio.

It was a Saturday, and at three o'clock there would be music in the kiosk from the band of the Carabinieri.

So fine was the afternoon that a crowd of people would probably be there. It was early in November, and though the gay season of Rome had not begun, would not begin till after Christmas, though the Costanzi had not yet opened its doors to opera-goers, and though many of the Roman aristocracy still lingered in their country places, yet numerous palaces and apartments were already occupied, most of the diplomats accredited to the Quirinal and the Vatican had returned to their duties, and in the hotels and the innumerable pensions there was a goodly number of guests. So the young girls and their governesses walked towards the Pincio, intent on hearing the music, but still more intent on having a peep at the world.

As the hour struck, the conductor took his stand in the pillared kiosk, settled his peaked cap firmly on his head with an air of martial resolution, threw back his long cloak, lifted his arm, and the first notes of a potpourri of airs from *Aida* rang out to the waiting crowd.

It was not a very large crowd as yet, and it was not at all fashionable. The children were there, the young girls with their chaperons, tourists, students, casual old gentlemen with newspapers, odd Russians and Germans, little French painters in soft hats, flowing ties, and corduroy trousers that looked like divided skirts, independent English and American women with opera-glasses over their shoulders and guide-books in their hands. But there were few gay and pretty women, few smart Italian men, and not many of the idle cosmopolitans who year by year come to winter in Rome. The crowd on the Pincio is not what it used to be. And as yet it was too early. When the true lovers of the Pincio and the *passeggiata* did come, they would stay, many of them, till the sun set, till the straight fringe of pine-trees that crowns the hill-top between St. Peter's and Monte Mario was black against the rose or the amber of the sky, till under the ilex trees of the Villa Borghese the shadows were deep and sombre, and the murmur of the fountains was like the whisper of the night stealing to take possession of her Pagan territory.

Little iron chairs were dotted about in the neighbourhood of the kiosk, and presently a couple of young Englishwomen walked briskly up and took possession of two of them. They were plainly dressed in dark skirts and blouses, with belts round their trim waists, and flowered hats on their fluffy hair. Their faces were full of excitement, and they sat down in a place that commanded a good view of the road with an air almost of triumph.

'We shall see splendidly here, Jenny,' said one. 'Shan't we? I wonder if there 'll be any princesses! They say Rome 's fairly full of them. I do wish we had some one with us that could tell us who they all are. And we 'll go down the steps when it 's over and get a cup of tea in the Piazzer, shall we? You know! At that place where we went Thursday after St. Peter's.'

They settled themselves to stare. They belonged to a party of English school-teachers who, having all contributed to a common fund, were now, under the auspices of one of those agencies which run cheap trips on the Continent, passing a week in Rome.

The crowd gradually thickened as the time drew on

towards four, and the two young women found many things to attract their attention and to stir them to comment. They wondered at the sight of men enclosed in broughams, often with the windows up, revolving slowly round and round. They marvelled at the odd shapes of some of the motor-cars of foreign makes that drew up on the other side of the road. The hats of certain *canzonettiste* from the Teatro Olympia roused them to excited discussion. And they gained great pleasure—tinged, they thought, with a certain high intellectuality—in trying to pick out from the cosmopolitan throng the various nationalities represented in it.

Presently their happily agile curiosity was caught and fixed by the two occupants of a soberly coloured, but perfectly built, victoria, which went slowly by, vanished and, reappeared, having circled among the ilexes.

'Look, Jenny! What a little duck of a dog! What kind is it?'

'It isn't a Pom!'

'No. Is it a King Charles?

'Not it! I believe it's one of the rare dogs that come from China, and that cost a mint of money. Dear! I do wish I was rich. I should like to sit there like she does with that dog in my lap. She must be happy.'

'She' was the other occupant of the victoria, which at this moment passed out of sight.

'Somehow I don't think she looked happy,' said the other school-teacher, pulling down her belt—a young Italian had just sent her an expressive glance from his velvety eyes. 'She seemed very fond of the dog, if you like. Who wouldn't be? I'm sure she just dotes on it. But I shouldn't call it a happy face. There's a lot of those ladies in carriages with dogs and what not, who don't look half as lively as you.'

'Oh, me! Well, when should I look lively if not on a trip like this? I've been thinking about it for years. There she comes again!

This time the carriage drew up not far from the two girls, and the footman got down from the box and stood near it like a sentinel, while his mistress enjoyed the sun and the air, and listened to the music. The dog from China, seated upon her knee in a prominent manner, sniffed perpetually

with his blunt nose, and stared about him with heavy, convex eyes, which seemed to be swimming in a bluish fluid.

'Do you think she 's foreign ?

'She 's dark. Perhaps she 's an Italian.'

'I don't believe it. Somehow I believe she 's English.

'Oh, no ! Never ! What makes you think so ? '

'Something—the way she sits.'

'Sits ! How could any one sit any different from the way she does ? '

'How you do catch one up, Jenny ! The way she is then ! Say what you will, there is an English way and a foreign way. I do like her things. Look ! She 's stroking the dog's head. Would you call her pretty ? '

'Yes, very.'

'Well, I think it 's more mysterious than pretty—her whole look, I mean. Now she 's going on again.'

The footman was up on his box once more. The coachman touched the horses with his whip, and the carriage moved. Just at this moment two children with their attendant came between the school-teachers and the carriage, a girl of about four years old and a much smaller boy, who struggled forward with a sort of haphazard precaution, laughing, as if almost intoxicated with triumph at his own powers in being able to walk at all. Both children were clad in white plush coats and white hats, and the girl, going backwards before the boy, and holding out her arms towards him, kept crying out : '*Addio*, Peppino ! *Addio*, Peppino ! ' as she receded, taking a charming care to keep always very near to her brother.

Peppino grew red with determination not to be escaped from. With the doughty, and almost ruthless air of a young warrior, no longer laughing, but now frowning with concentration, he measured the might of his short legs, encased in white woollen gaiters, against the might of the impeding atmosphere. And still the girl roguishly cried out : '*Addio*, Peppino ! ' as she tempted him prettily onwards.

The woman in the carriage looked at the babies—they were little more—in their white coats, taking their first steps into life ; at the girl child leading the boy child onward with her voice and her outstretched arms.

Addio, Peppino! *Addio*, Peppino!

Always the little girl walked backwards keeping her eyes on the boy, and smiling, with her head a little on one side. The woman put out one hand as if to fend the children off. Perhaps she feared they might come too near to the carriage wheels. Her gesture was repellent. The nurse called out. The little girl turned and stood still, staring at the dog as if completely fascinated.

The woman gazed at her and at her small brother, and the dog seemed to gaze at them too, with his heavy eyes which bulged beneath his domed forehead. Then the horses trotted, and the woman was carried away into the midst of the thickening crowd.

As if moved by a mutual impulse the two school-teachers turned and stared at each other. The light, the excitement had died away from their faces.

'Well!' said she who was called Jenny at length, with a deep breath; 'well, I never! Did you see that?

'Yes. She did look'—the girl paused, as if seeking suitable word—'she did look awful!' she concluded lamely.

'Perhaps she hates children.'

'Oh, no! It wasn't that! Besides who hates children?

'You never know.'

'No, Jenny, it wasn't that.'

The music stopped.

'I vote we go,' said Jenny. 'I feel I want a cup of tea.'

She got up.

'It gets a bit cold towards sunset,' she added.

'Yes, so it does. I should like something to warm me up.'

The two girls went off slowly together.

Meanwhile the woman with the dog, who had not seen the two girls, and who was never to know of their existence, made the round of the Villa Borghese, and presently returned to the Pincio.

Please draw up on the terrace facing the music," she said in Italian to the footman.

He spoke to the coachman, and the victoria joined a line of carriages and motors on the terrace from which may be seen a wide view over the cupolas and towers of Rome.

The sun was still shining with a temperate brightness, and, despite the comment of the school-teacher, the air had

not lost its warmth. Once more the band was playing a lively air. The crowd had increased. The space in front of the kiosk was thronged with people. The footman again got down from the box of the victoria and stood beside it, so that the view of his mistress was not impeded. Leaning back with the dog still held on her knee, she looked across the roadway.

Exactly in front of her, sideways to her carriage, a big, red motor-car was drawn up. It contained a tribe of very fair youngsters in jerseys and red caps. They were Russians, blooming with health, with sturdy limbs, frank blue eyes, and primrose coloured hair. Among them, almost immersed in them, was a patriarch. His yellow, serene face, with prominent cheek-bones, his thick, snow-white hair, showed as it were through a moving veil of children, which almost hid him from sight. Beside the chauffeur, who wore a long fan-shaped black beard, sat a small woman of about forty, who looked like a governess.

The children, of whom there were probably five or six, who moved about with such rapidity—climbing on the seats, disappearing unexpectedly into the depths of the motor, and with equal unexpectedness popping up again—that it was not easy to number them, talked perpetually in French, now among themselves, now to the governess or to the old gentleman sunk down in the seat of honour. They pointed at everything which interested them, beat time to the music with their little soft hands—hands which looked strangely innocent—uttered shrill cries, and occasionally clambering up to some point of vantage, tumbled from it, drawing shrieks of laughter from safety-planted brothers and sisters. The governess, turning, sometimes held up a warning finger, which was joyously disregarded by all. As to the old grandpapa, he remained calm as some contented old tree about which young tendrils were twining, throwing their tender green arms about his gnarled and weather-beaten trunk, striving to conceal the ravages of time with their fresh beauty, and clinging to his well-tried strength.

The woman in the victoria watched this joyous party.

She was just twenty-nine, but looked scarcely more than twenty-six, despite her pale complexion, and the pathetic

expression in her large, deep brown eyes, which had heavy lids, very long upper and under lashes, and faint shadows, almost like delicate stains beneath them. They were not set straight in her head, but slanted downwards towards her temples. Her eyebrows, which were very long and jet-black, also slanted markedly downwards. Her white face was oval and small, with a low forehead framed in thick, wavy black hair, a straight, small nose, with nostrils which often looked slightly distended, and a beautiful mouth, tending downwards, like eyelids and eyebrows, but only enough to be wistful in expression. The red lips were pressed together, almost as if to retain some secret, above a delicately firm chin. The ears were tiny. Her small head, her great eyes, her nostrils, and her charmingly graceful neck, which was long and looked frail, had led the friends of Dolores Cannynge to christen her Gazelle. Many people habitually spoke of her as Gazelle Cannynge, and there was reason for the nickname. She was tall and very slim, with little ankles and wrists, small, delicate feet and hands. And in her movements and all her ways there was something pervasively feminine and fastidious that was absolutely natural, and that she was wholly unaware of.

A shriek of laughter came from the red motor-car. One of the children had essayed to jump from beside the chauffeur to the seat next Grandpapa, and had accomplished an unusually successful fall. Even old Grandpapa was shaking slowly with mirth. And the governess was making grotesque faces in the endeavour to look stern above a mouth that was bent on smiling.

The dog from China uttered a muffled bark. His mistress tapped his head to quiet him, and looked away from the radiant children to the left. There, on a bench beneath the ilex trees, sat a nurse in a white cap and apron, holding against her a profoundly sleeping child, whose face was covered with a white veil, and whose short legs, in close woollen gaiters, stuck out in space with an artless disregard of appearances which was comic, yet also pathetic.

For a long time Dolores gazed at these little legs. She no longer heard the gay noise of the music. She was no longer conscious of the crowd. She was away in a world of clinging helplessness, in a world of instinctive trust.

A voice at her side startled her. It said:

'Then you have bought the wonderful doggie!'

A middle-aged and rather carelessly-dressed woman, in a black toque which had got tilted to one side when it ought to have been straight, was standing close to the carriage, looking at Dolores with kind grey eyes, and holding out a large, generous hand. About her neck she had a long streamer of purple gauze, and round her toque was a big gauze veil which had gone hopelessly wrong. She clasped the hand of Dolores, and continued:

'Is he satisfactory? Has he brought you the joy you anticipated?'

'But I didn't anticipate anything so evasive. Won't you get into the carriage? I'm all alone, as you see.'

'Or will you get out and take a little walk with me?'

'If you like.'

The dog began to scramble and stretch.

'He wants a walk. What do you call him?

'Nero.'

They began to stroll down the ilex avenue, passing the nurse with the sleeping child, from whom Dolores looked away. The dog accompanied them, stepping daintily, and stopping now and then to smell the earth round the trunks of the trees.

'Why do you call the little wretch that?'

'My husband baptized him, and doesn't love him at all. He says poor Nero has the dull eye of an egotist and a tyrant. And he thinks the breed unnatural looking.'

'To speak quite frankly, so do I,' said Lady Sarah Ides. 'The head is bulbous, but signifies nothing. The eyes are large but dull. And the expression seems to me fretful, like that of a naturally disagreeable person suffering from an attack of influenza. Why didn't you get a terrier?'

'Everybody has a terrier. And terriers are so frightfully active.'

'Like children. What dozens of children there are out to-day.'

'Yes,' said Dolores. 'Shall we turn and go to the terrace for a minute? There's the Boccara! I didn't know she was back yet.'

She nodded to a birdlike and very pretty woman, with

Venetian red hair and upturned eyebrows, who at that moment passed them in a landaulette. The pretty woman smiled brilliantly, pulled a string, and the motor stopped.

'How nice to see you again! I've just arrived from Paris. Motored all the way. Nino's been in Monte Carlo. Don't ask me why, or with whom. But I shall tell you almost directly. I feel I'm going to. Come to tea at the Excelsior to-day. Can you?'

'Yes,' said Dolores. 'I'm not obliged to go anywhere else this afternoon.'

'I'll tell you then perhaps—probably. Directly the sun sets! I'll be in the hall. What a delicious dog. So odd and expensive looking. Bring him. I love dogs. So much nicer than babies! And then they don't spoil one's figure!'

She drove away.

'D' you know Madeleine Boccara?' said Dolores to Lady Sarah, as they went on towards the terrace.

'No. She doesn't come into my *ambiente*. Rome, small as it is in comparison with London and Paris, is full of sets which seldom mingle. And I'm an old thing, and haunt churches and galleries, and walk in the byways, while the little Boccara goes to the Excelsior and the Grand Hotel. I've seen her often though, and of course she's famous.'

'For her beauty you mean?'

'No. She's the woman who has never seen the Colosseum or the Vatican, and who doesn't know where they are, or says she doesn't.'

'Little *poseuse*!'

'We mustn't forget she's only been in Rome for seven or eight years.'

'I know. She's from Lyons, but says she's a Parisian. I'm rather fond of her, but Theo isn't. He thinks she leads all the frivolity of Rome.'

'But is Sir Theodore such an enemy of harmless frivolity? He must have seen a great deal of it when he was in diplomacy, and I never heard that he was a Puritan.

'He isn't. But since he retired——' she stopped. Then she said with a changed voice: 'Oh! if only he hadn't retired! If only he were still in the service! It's such a mistake for a man no older than Theo, with Theo's nature, to retire so early. Such a mistake!'

There was in her voice an emotion that seemed excessive, and her small face, always very expressive, had become almost mysteriously intense.

'Why did he retire?'

'Well, you know, Theo often acts suddenly. He was very disappointed at losing Vienna. He quite thought he was going to have it, and that he would do wonders there. And he simply hated the idea of being Minister at Stockholm. Stagnation varied by tobogganning, he called it. And just at the moment when he was in this mood, all the Templeton money came to him and made him independent. He gave in his resignation without saying a word to me.'

'And if he had consulted you?'

'I should never have let him retire, never.'

She spoke with a sudden force and determination that were almost startling.

'I would have gone to Stockholm, Pekin, Patagonia, anywhere with him rather than that he should retire.'

Lady Sarah put up her hand to her head, and gave her toque a push, which sent it not into its proper place, but beyond.

'D' you think it so very bad for him to be without regular occupation?' she asked, after a moment, with a rather anxious glance towards her companion.

'Yes, I do. I know it is.'

They had come to the terrace, and now stood still looking down over Rome.

Some bells were ringing beneath them. The golden air was full of voices, the sky full of the touching light of late afternoon, which seems to tremble with wonder at its own magic, like a soul finding within itself a virtue that comes from afar. Several people were standing by the balustrade and looking down. Among them was a priest, evidently English, broad built, with blue eyes, and a strong, but tender face. He glanced at Dolores, then turned his eyes towards St. Peter's. His lips moved. Perhaps he was murmuring a prayer. A nun, dressed in violet and black, came up at the head of a little band of children, who followed her as lambs follow a shepherd of the Campagna. She, too, looked towards St. Peter's with her quiet eyes, which resembled the eyes of a child. For a moment she stopped,

and all the children at once gathered eagerly round her, lifting their innocent faces to hers, which was equally innocent. She spoke to them in Italian, saying something about '*Il Papa*,' and pointing with one thin, kind-looking hand towards the great dome which dominated the city. Then she walked on with her flock behind her, confidingly treading in her footsteps, and looking very happy and very safe.

'Dear, dear little things!' said Lady Sarah, following them with her eyes, which had filled with tears. 'Dear little purifiers of the world! Ah, I often wish now that I were a nun teaching at the Sacré Cœur. Last Sunday I was there at Benediction. And how I wished it, when I saw the little innocent creatures in their veils filing in behind the grille.'

'I cannot imagine you a nun.'

'No, my dear! And you are quite right, I'm a dusty old worldling and quite unfit for the regions of dew.'

She put up a handkerchief and wiped her eyes openly, then pulled her veil more awry.

'And you could never shut out your beloved Rome,' said Dolores, 'your beloved Pagan Rome. Come and sit in the carriage for ten minutes. If we stay here, Nero——'

At this moment Nero uttered a piercing cry. A child had inadvertently trodden on one of his delicate paws. Dolores bent down quickly and picked him up. But she did not pet him. And when they were in the victoria she put him down on the floor, and told him he was to sit quiet.

'You are not like Madeleine Boccara,' continued Dolores; 'you love Rome.'

'And not only Pagan Rome. But don't you?'

'I didn't want at all to come back this year. I wanted to go to Cannes, or Mentone, or Egypt. But Theo would come. Of course I didn't tell him I was tired of Rome.'

She added the last words rather hastily, and they did not sound quite sincere.

'But why not tell him—if you really are tired?'

'I don't choose to.'

She looked down at the dog, and smoothed the light rug that lay over her knees with one of her narrow, delicate hands.

'There were difficulties,' she continued slowly. 'You

see we had taken that apartment in the Barberini Palace. No doubt we might have got out of it, but '—she turned and looked at Lady Sarah—' I had no real reason to give against wintering here, and I didn't wish to seem what I am not.'

'What 's that, my dear ? '

'A capricious woman.'

'Are you never capricious ? '

Lady Sarah was smiling.

'Not with Theo. At least I don't think I am.'

She said the last words rather hesitatingly and slowly, raising her eyebrows a little, and looking very thoughtful and unconscious of herself.

'I may be about small things ; buying a particular dog, or some nonsense of that kind. But not about the things that matter, the big things in Theo's life and mine. I often think in the very big things men are more capricious than we are.'

She sighed softly. Lady Sarah felt inclined to give her a good hug.

There was something in Dolores that appealed to women as well as to men, a soft naturalness that was seductive. Yet it was impossible to look at her and not to feel that if she once made a resolve she would probably carry it out with an invincible firmness. Those lips were not pressed together without a reason that lay in her character. But the eyes seemed to say that not easily would she take a strong resolve.

'Men call their caprices their fates,' said Lady Sarah. 'But since you are settled in Rome, my dear child, why not use it as I do ? '

'As you do ? '

'Yes. I think you know how that is. Rome is to me consolation.'

Dolores moved as if startled. Her little head turned quickly on her long neck, and her eyes became suddenly bright and searching as they looked into Lady Sarah's.

'Why should I need consolation ? ' she said.

And in her voice there was a distinct sound of defiance.

'Most of us do, I believe.'

Doroles laughed.

'If I did do you think I could find it among marble statues or in the aisles of old churches ? '

Would you rather seek for it in a cotillon at the Excelsior ?'

'I didn't say that.'

'Well,' said Lady Sarah, 'I need consolation badly, and I find it in Rome.'

Dolores' face softened, and she put her hand for a moment on her companion's knee.

'I know, I know. But at least you 've had the only things worth having.'

'Do you mean children ?'

Dolores moved her head.

'Yes, I have had them and I have lost them.'

Almost with fierceness Doroles said :

'I envy you ! I envy you !'

At this moment Nero, probably feeling neglected, or even outraged by his situation among toes on a carriage floor, from which he could see little, made a convulsive effort to better himself by scrambling into prominence. Dolores took him by the neck, with less than her usual gentleness, and assisted him on to her knees.

'Look at the substitute for children in my life !' she said.

Suddenly she forgot to be reticent.

She took Nero's head between her hands and turned it round till the dog faced Lady Sarah.

'There !' she exclaimed. 'That is the substitute.'

Nero snuffled. Drops of moisture stood on his eyelashes. He blinked and looked dull and arrogant.

'The lonely women with dogs !' continued Dolores. Ah ! how the mothers must laugh at them, must pity the poor things !'

Nero gave a strangled yelp. Unconsciously his mistress had pressed her hands rudely against the delicate dome of his head.

'But you are young,' said Lady Sarah, very gently. 'Perhaps . . .'

'No, no. I hoped ; for years I hoped. But I 've given up hoping. Look ! The carriages are moving !'

The chauffeur with the fan-shaped board bent down and was going to press the button of his motor, when one of the children, a boy, who had scrambled up beside him, interfered, and evidently begged to be permitted to do it. Smiling,

the chauffeur took his small eager hand and guided it. A sudden purring arose from the machine. The little boy, strongly excited by his achievement, sprang up on the seat, turned round to old Grandpapa, and vociferously drew attention to his triumph as the motor moved off. His rosy face shone with pride under his red cap. His brothers and sisters looked at him with a sudden respect and gravity. Grandpapa's yellow face smiled, and he slowly nodded his head as if in approval of the great and unexpected deed.

The mouth of Dolores became almost stern.

'Let me drive you home,' she said to Lady Sarah.

'No, my dear; I am going into the church of the Sacré Cœur for a little. But—won't you come with me?'

'I'm so sorry, but I have promised to go to tea with Madeleine Boccara at the Excelsior. You remember!'

'To be sure.'

Lady Sarah got out.

'Do come and see me at the Barberini very soon. Theo will like to see you too. We have just moved in. I want to show you all we are doing to the apartment.'

'I will come very soon.'

'To the Excelsior!' said Dolores to the footman.

She drove off with Nero enthroned on her knee.

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CHAPTER II

It was nearly five o'clock when Dolores arrived at the Excelsior Hotel. As she entered the hall on the right of the tea-room, little Countess Boccara came to meet her.

'We shall be all alone,' she said in her pretty, rather careful English. 'So we can say all that is in our hearts. If there is nothing—then all that is in our heads.'

With a caressing gesture she put her hand on the arm of Dolores, and led her into the tea-room.

'Let us go into this corner. But there are not many people. We shall be private.'

As she said this she glanced eagerly about the great room

with eyes that seemed searching for acquaintances. She nodded, lifted her hand till it was near to her face, and opened and half shut it several times, smiling. It was her pose to be thoroughly Italian.

'Amalia Brunati with Tito!' she exclaimed. 'Per piacere due thé,' to the waiter. 'Will you have toast, *cara*?' she added to Dolores. 'I eat nothing. I fear so terribly to grow like the elephant.'

Dolores could not help laughing.

'Yes, some toast for me, please. I am too thin.'

'You are perfect, like the gazelle, as all say.'

She suddenly broke into French, and continued the conversation in that language.

'But I must tell you, *cara*, that I was really born to be fat. No! No!'—as Dolores was going to protest—'you do not know. But I was! As a child I was enormous, monstrous! It is only by my cleverness, my strong will and my energy that I am so slim. All Rome speaks of my wonderful figure. But I have worked, lived for it, and still I work, I live for it. I do not eat. I do not drink wine, but only Vichy and Kissingen waters. I do not rest after any meal, but stand up like a sentinel at the Quirinal, and all for my figure. Some one, a philosopher perhaps—it is always one of those tiresome old philosophers!—has said, "Everybody must live for something." Well, I live for my figure. And you? But I know. You live for the adorable doglet!'

And she bent down her pretty birdlike face, and pretended to kiss the nose of Nero with lips which were delicately painted.

A waiter brought the tea.

'Now we can talk!' continued the Countess, as if she had been silent all this time. 'Tell me, is it for the doglet that you live?'

'I don't know what I live for,' replied Dolores.

And her voice, after the Countess's gay tones, sounded almost sombre.

'I certainly don't live for Nero,' she added, giving that potentate a bit of buttered toast, which he took sluggishly, licked, turned over, and abandoned disdainfully upon the carpet.

'I shall find you something to live for,' said Countess

'Boccara,' with a sly inflection of her voice. 'Or—no—some one.'

'Oh, if you speak of human beings I have Theo.'

'Your beautiful husband! Ah! how handsome he is!'

'Yes, he is very handsome.'

'But for how many years—eight—ten——?'

'I've been married ten years exactly.'

'For ten years you have lived for the beautiful Theo, and at the end you say, with a voice like a Camposanto, that you don't know what you live for. This is not good! We must remedy this.'

'I was talking nonsense.'

'With those eyes, that pale face, and so tall as you are! No. It is not for you to talk nonsense. It is for me, with my turned-up nose and my red hair. You have to be mysterious, to suffer, to make people wonder about you. And you have to live for some one. And I think I know for whom.'

'Absurd!' said Dolores.

She spoke lightly, but her expressive face had changed. A faint look, as of dawning anxiety, that was surely the physical reflection of a mental shadow, crossed it, darkening it strangely for a moment.

'You are always divining secrets that do not exist,' she added, with a little laugh.

'Secrets! Did I say there was a secret?' cried the little Countess, almost sharply.

She leaned forward over the tea-table, staring at Dolores with her bright, red-brown eyes.

'You have told me!' she said slowly, nodding her head. 'You have told me!'

'What have I told you?'

'Two things. That you do not live for your beautiful husband, and that you have a secret. Ah, it is dangerous to deny what no one has suggested, *cara!*'

She paused, then added with a shrewdness that in her took the place of intellectuality:

'It shows how the mind is working far away under all the words.'

She nodded again with an air of wisdom, and sipped her tea, keeping her eyes fixed on Dolores.

'Are you going to hunt this winter?' she suddenly exclaimed with a change of manner.

'No,' said Dolores.

She spoke with a decision that was unexpected even by herself, for till that moment she had not thought about the question of hunting. A defensive instinct, abruptly developed, seemed to answer for her.

'I shall have such a lot to do getting into our new apartment,' she added, more easily, 'arranging everything, making it pretty. There are endless things to think of. Besides there are so many expenses. We shall have to be quiet for a time.'

'Quiet! When the beautiful husband has become a millionaire!'

'He hasn't. People exaggerate frightfully. Besides'—she suddenly thought of Lady Sarah, and resolved to call her up as a reserve—'this winter I am going to study.'

'Study!' exclaimed the Countess, with half-incredulous amazement.

'Study Rome. I am ashamed at my ignorance of Rome. Lady Sarah Ides—I was with her just now when I met you—is going to show me all the beautiful things I ought to have seen long ago.'

'The old lady with the little hat on her left shoulder, and the veil floating at—what is it when some one is dead?'

'Do you mean half-mast?' said Dolores in English.

'That is it.'

'She knows Rome. We don't.'

'It is her genre to know Rome. She is an old maid.'

'Indeed she isn't. She has been married and had two children.'

'And where are they?'

'They are both dead, her husband too.'

'Poor woman! Then she must study. But your husband is not dead, and you have never lost any children because, like me, you have never had any. Children ruin the figure. I shall never have babies.'

'What is my genre then?' asked Dolores to turn the conversation.

Although she was not a prude, the extreme frankness

of some of the women she met in Rome occasionally embarrassed her.

'If I may not be a student, what may I be?'

Countess Boccara looked at Dolores with cool criticism over her tea-cup.

'It is not your genre to carry a string bag full of Baedeker, to spend the day in Catacombs where all is dark, and where a dirty monk shows you round with a tallow candle, and to go at five and have tea, with all the other string bags from the Catacombs, in the Piazza di Spagna, where the only men have red noses, weak eyes, no hair, drink cacao, and wipe their moustaches, which droop as the walrus, with paper napkins. No! no!'

Dolores could not help laughing at this picture of the ovens of ancient Rome.

'Your genre is——' she paused.

She became grave, even earnest. And it was evident that she was making an unusually conscious mental effort.

'Your genre is to love, to be loved, and perhaps to suffer terribly, but always because of love. And you must do this in a certain *milieu*; of cultivation, of beauty, of mondanity. You must love, you must suffer *en grande tenue*, not with the little hat on the left shoulder, and the gauze for the dead, like the old lady who knows Rome. We are stamped, my dear, when we are born, just as the new money is, and it is useless to try to get rid of our stamp. And if we did! Why we should not pass any more! No one could buy anything with us.'

'No one has bought anything with me,' said Dolores with sudden bitterness.

'What? not the beautiful husband? But he is so devoted to you, is not he? Has he not bought with you all the happiness of love?'

Dolores, if she had done the natural thing at that moment, would have cried, perhaps shrieked out: 'No! No! He has not! He has not!' Being who and what she was, and where she was, in the great room with the green and gold columns, the pink and red carpets, the cleverly arranged lights, and the many softly gossiping women, she said:

'Give me another cup of tea, dear. Theo and I are a very united couple, if that 's what you mean. But you see,

we don't understand life quite as you do. We take matrimony much more seriously than you and your Nino take it.'

The Countess poured out the tea, and twisted her little nose.

'Oh, but my Nino would be quite ready to take it seriously if I would,' she said, handing the cup.

'Really! Then why don't you?'

'Because I have my stamp. And it isn't that sort.'

She looked into a large mirror near by.

'With these clinging gowns, unless one has a figure like mine one is simply a terror—the Colosseum trying to be the Alhambra.' Suddenly her pretty, vivacious face was illuminated by a light of triumph. 'There! And they say I know nothing of antiquities!' she cried.

She seemed pleased with herself like a child.

'How I wish the old lady who knows Rome had heard that!' she added. 'People misunderstand me. They say I am frivolous.'

At this moment there appeared at the other end of the tea-room a tall, serious-looking man with thick fair hair, a long nose, and a monocle unattached to a string, escorting a pretty, small woman, with golden hair, blunt features, rather prominent cheeks, and china blue eyes, who was dressed in a short green velvet dress, and who was accompanied by a little girl with a yellow pigtail tied with an immense black riband.

'There 's Nino with his last lady love!' exclaimed the Countess. 'Mrs. Tooms, an American. Look, they are sitting down! Nino won't see me. He never sees anything when he wears his monocle.'

'Do you know Mrs. Tooms?'

'No. But I know all I need to know about her—from Nino. He does love telling me things. And he tells them well, for a Roman. Of course Parisians are far more witty. She 's got a good figure, but only because she knows where to go for her corsets. Now I needn't wear a corset at all unless I want to. That makes Nino angry, because at present he wants to pretend that Mrs. Tooms, though she has three little girls, has a better figure than mine. As if a man could judge of such things! Are you going already?'

'I must. I have so much to do at home just now.'

Always the excuse of the apartment! But wait one minute! When will you dine with me? I want to give a little dinner at the Grand.'

Dolores hesitated, with her large eyes fixed on the lively face of the Countess.

'No. I'm not going to ask the beautiful husband!' the latter said. Nor Nino. What night is your husband engaged?'

'I believe he's engaged on Thursday—a man's dinner at the Embassy.'

'Come on Thursday, at half-past eight—Grand Hotel.'

'It's very nice of you,' said Dolores, still with hesitation. But who is coming?'

'How suspicious you are!'

The Countess laughed lightly and merrily like a mischievous child.

'If you are afraid of any particular person, tell me, and he shall not be asked.'

'Afraid! Whom should I be afraid of? Of course I will come.'

'Looking like a lovely gazelle, with pathetic eyes. *Cara*, I will tell you a secret. For me you are the most beautiful person in Rome. You look as if you had lost something, and were seeking it in the dark. If you ever find it—ah! then you will be too beautiful! We other women are always praying you may not. But I have never told you about Nino at Monte Carlo. Well, that must be for another time!'

Dolores had not far to go. The words of the little Countess were still in her ears and in her mind when the carriage turned into the garden of the Palazzo Barberini, and circled till it drew up under the colonnade.

'If you ever find it—ah! then you will be too beautiful!'

Were the other women praying? If so, their prayers had been answered till now. Till now! They would always be answered.

'What a ridiculous little fool I am to take anything Madeleine Boccara says seriously,' said Dolores to herself, as she mounted the shallow stone stairs.

And of course she did not really take it seriously now that she was self-conscious. She was not a vain woman,

though she cared to look her best like most properly constituted women. And she did not for a moment think she was the most beautiful person in Rome, or even that the Countess thought so. But as she came into the first of the noble rooms in their apartment she stopped for a moment, with her eyes cast down, and she said to herself that Madeleine Boccara had implied one thing which was true. If she—Dolores—ever found that something for which she was seeking in the dark, she would indeed be far more beautiful. How well she knew that! How well she had known it for years! For beauty is completeness, and then she would be complete.

'But I'm not seeking! I'm not seeking any longer!' she murmured in her mind, telling herself a lie. 'And so it's all utterly absurd!'

And she turned on the electric light fully, and began critically to look at the great room.

It was square and lofty, with a painted ceiling on which Diana was represented bathing with attendant nymphs after a hunting excursion. The walls were covered with stamped Genovese leather, which gave to the room a rich and yet sober appearance, dignified and serene. Furniture was scattered about, but was not yet satisfactorily arranged. It looked temporary, as if it had hurriedly been brought in there, and would perhaps soon be as hurriedly carried out to some permanent home. Dolores pressed her lips together, and walked on into the next room, switching on the light there as she entered.

This was to be her special room, in which she could receive, but in which she also meant to carry on many of her occupations when she was alone. Like the first it was large and high with a painted ceiling, and much time and care had evidently been spent on its arrangement. The prevailing colours in it were a deep green and a very splendid red, almost such a red as Gustave Moreau was obsessed by. Green and red damask covered the walls, and damask curtains, surmounted by ancient gold cornices, hung at the long windows. There was a full-sized Steinway grand piano in the room. There were no pictures upon the walls, but several stood on easels. One, by Lenbach, was of a very old man, with a high bald forehead, long grey hair, and almost

transparent temples, on which veins like small dark snakes stood out. Under bushy eyebrows blazed a pair of eyes that looked fierce with vitality, and an intelligence that was so penetrating as to be almost alarming. Another was by a follower of Böcklin, and showed an old ruddy Italian mansion standing alone at the edge of a foaming sea, which rolled over sands fringed by the noble trees of a pinewood. A terrace with immense cypresses faced the white waves, over which seabirds were wheeling. And upon the red and crumbling wall of the terrace leaned the figure of a woman in a black dress, gazing out towards the horizon, from which a storm was coming. Beneath this landscape was written in gold letters: '*Donna guardando il mare.*' A third picture was a portrait by Carolus-Duran of Dolores, in a grey and green dress, with a white Pomeranian dog nestled on the floor against her skirt. It had been painted very soon after she was married, and showed a face in which there was a wistful mystery, but in which there was also hope. A Persian carpet, in which many faint colours blended, covered the floor, and the furniture was skilfully disposed to make the room, despite its large size, look thoroughly cosy and inhabited. There were several big azaleas blooming in Oriental jars, the air was scented with roses, and, a rare thing in Rome, a great many books were to be seen, in low and in revolving bookcases, and scattered over tables. On the hearth was burning a small, but very red and glowing, wood fire. Before it Nero sat down with a heavy, snuffling sigh, turning his back to his mistress with complete disregard of the proprieties.

Dolores stood looking about her. The room was very silent. Yet presently she seemed to be listening. For her face wore a look of sad and strained attention, and at last became set and rigid, like the face of one making a violent effort of the will or of the imagination. She clasped her hands together with the palms held outwards, and her arms straight down against her body.

Nero sighed again, and snuffled with determination. It seemed he had a cold. He drew closer to the fire, still keeping his back to his mistress. There was in his appearance at this moment an extraordinary look of dull yet concentrated egoism. Dolores glanced towards him and

unclasped her hands. And her face, no longer rigid, changed, melting into wistfulness and then into an almost despairing sadness. She went to the portrait of herself, stood before it for a moment, then crossed to a sofa by the fire, took off her hat and veil, laid them down beside her, and leaned back. And, with Nero, who seemed selfishly unaware of her presence, she stared into the red glow, as the women in the landscape on the easel stared across the sea over which a storm was approaching.

She was roused by the sound of the door by which she had come in being shut.

'Oh, is that you, Theo?' she said.

She turned round. A very tall and lean, but well-set-up man was standing just at the threshold of the room, looking at it with brilliant, and luminous, but rather sad brown eyes. He wore a moustache and a pointed beard just touched with grey. His very well-formed head was covered closely with straight hair in which also there were many grey threads. His complexion was dark and browned as if, naturally swarthy, it had been much exposed to the sun at some time of his life. His thin artistic hands were brown too, and looked eager and sensitive, and his features were regular, sharply cut, and not large. There was something restless and fiery, something wilful and critical, in his appearance. He was obviously a very intelligent man, and he looked a sincere one. He looked also like a man who would be subject to changing moods, and who was what is called highly strung. There was a certain resemblance of type between him and Dolores. Both were tall, slight, dark, expressive, and sensitive looking. But there were a softness, a wistfulness, and a mystery in her which were lacking in the man who stood near the door. He was keenly masculine. That was obvious. And it was equally obvious that she was almost touchingly feminine.

'It is you! What are you doing there?'

She leaned one arm on the back of the sofa, still turning round towards him.

'Looking at the room,' replied her husband.

He had a very deep and melodious bass voice, that was both strong and soft, and that always attracted people to him.

'It's beginning to look like your room,' he added, coming forward slowly till he could see the fire, and Nero seated before it.

An expression of distaste twisted his features as he perceived the dog, but he made no allusion to him.

'The first drawing-room, of course, doesn't exist as yet,' he continued.

'No. We must work at it.'

She stifled a sigh.

'They really are splendid rooms,' said Sir Theodore. 'We couldn't have made a better choice. But they need very perfect arranging. Luckily you and I are no fools about such matters, Doloretta. We'll have it all beautiful, but we'll have it cosy too.'

He drew out a cigar-case, opened it, and took out a large, light-coloured Havana.

'I've got time before dinner, haven't I?'

A clock chimed.

'Only seven. I suppose the *Tribuna* hasn't c

'I haven't seen it,' said Dolores.

Her husband lighted his cigar. He was still standing. She, with a supple movement, almost like a child's, had drawn up her feet on to the sofa, and was sitting half curled up among the cushions.

'Shall I ring and ask?' she added.

'No, don't bother.'

He seemed to hesitate. Then he said:

'My room doesn't do at all yet.'

And he sat down in an arm-chair and stretched out his very long legs. He was six foot three, but he was a graceful man, with a singular ease of movement, so that his unusual height never struck people disagreeably.

'Are you glad to be out of the Grand Hotel?' he continued, pulling at his cigar.

'I shall be when everything is quite right. But there is always something dreadful in rooms that are not finished and have not been lived in, especially when they are so large as these.'

'Keep to this one.'

'Yes, but one feels the others on either side.'

'Sensitive plant.'

He said it kindly, almost tenderly, and for a moment the lips of Dolores quivered.

'Women are always affected by the little things connected with a house, I suppose,' she said, with an effort at careless detachment.

'So are men, if they're at all like me, especially when they're out of harness.'

He sighed, and immediately afterwards Nero sighed too, by the fire.

Sir Theodore looked irritated.

'They have more time to notice and feel all the little things,' he added, 'when they are out of harness.'

Dolores was gazing at him now, but he was not looking at her. He was staring towards the fire.

'Aren't you accustomed yet to being out of harness, Theo?' she said. 'It's a year now.'

'Yes, just a year since we came to Rome, free people. I'm thankful to be here instead of up in the Northern snows. But still—well, I wish I were in Vienna, Doloretta, as Ambassador. I confess that. You would have made a delicious ambassadress. I should have been proud of you.'

'As an ambassadress?'

She spoke with an emphasis that attracted his attention. He looked away from the fire, in which, perhaps, he had seen the Embassy at Vienna.

'What is it, Doloretta?'

'Only that I can't help wishing I were her Excellency,' she answered lightly.

He looked at her intently.

'Were you ambitious too?' he asked. 'Somehow, I never thought so. Were you really ambitious?'

'Why not? Isn't it natural I should be?'

'But then, what a secretive Gazelle you are!'

He drew his chair forward a little nearer to the sofa.

'Were you very vexed with me for retiring?' he said.

'I was very sorry you retired.'

'For yourself?'

'I was sorry on all accounts. I didn't think you were the sort of man who could be happily idle.'

'But I've got so many tastes, so many hobbies.'

He paused. Dolores was silent.

Haven't I ?'

'Yes.'

'Surely,' he spoke with a certain pressure—'surely I could fill up my time far better than the average man ?'

'Are you happily idle then ?'

She on her side showed curiosity, and she leaned forward as she put the question.

'Why not ?'

'You are !'

'I 'm free of a great many duties that were tiresome, that bored me, that would have been increased had I been made an ambassador. You have no idea—but of course you have. Even at Tangier we had enough social *ennui*, hadn't we ?'

'Let us congratulate ourselves on our escape !'

Since he did not choose to be frank, neither did she. Her voice seemed to imply that.

'We can both pursue our hobbies ferociously,' she added. 'I my music, my reading, you your antiquity hunting and your fox hunting, your motoring, your sketching, your Russian. You can write a play if you like. When we were at Tangier you often said you wished you had time to try to write a play——'

She broke off. She was not a good hand at sarcasm, and was soon exhausted by an effort unnatural to her.

'When one has no time for things one longs to do them. But when one has unlimited time one sometimes realises one's limitations unpleasantly. I have diplomatic gifts. But as to becoming a writer of plays, or, in fact anything else—now, it 's too late. At fifty one is formed, if not deformed.'

Perhaps her attempt at satire had turned him towards the truth he had seemed anxious to avoid. For now he said, with a new gravity :

'Doloretta, it is getting in here, into this apartment, that has done it.'

'Done what, Theo ?'

'Made me understand what a deuce of a mistake I made in resigning. As long as we were *sur la branche*, in hotels, moving, staying in other people's houses, I could deceive myself, could pretend I was taking a holiday. But now we

are settled, or nearly settled, the truth appears, and it is naked as Adam before the Fall. The very first night we slept in this apartment I realised what a fool I had been.'

Dolores had wanted the truth. Now that she had got it she looked troubled.

'Did you?' she said, and her voice was blank.

Her husband got up and stood by the fireplace, which was deep and high, and was surmounted by a handsome stone mantelpiece with columns, and a frieze of little dancing boys.

'Yes. It is in one's home that one knows the real truth of one's life.'

'Is it?'

'But surely you, a woman, must know that better than I!'

He leaned one arm against the frieze, and looked down on her from his great height, and his eyes were very earnest as he went on.

'Outside, one is taken by the world, one is deafened by voices, blinded by the cloud of little things that sweep upon one like locusts and blot out the reality in which one is. One might be anywhere. One doesn't see. But in one's own home one sees. And now we are at home.'

'Yes.'

'When you come to think of it, Doloretta, this is really the first time since we've been married that we've been in our very own home, chosen by ourselves, in a place we selected. For a diplomatist is always on the move, and has to go where he is sent, and get what house or flat he can.'

'Yes.'

Though Dolores was monosyllabic her eyes were becoming almost horribly eloquent as she looked up at her husband. In their depths fear seemed to lurk. Yet they asked for more truth. And it seemed that he saw only that demand and not the fear behind it. For he continued:

'Ten years married and this really our first home! Our own shell! It is no wonder, I suppose, that it comes upon me almost as a shock.'

'A shock—to be in your own home!'

'The novelty of it. It certainly is a beautiful home in a beautiful city, but still——'

'Theo,' she said, and her manner and voice had completely

changed, were now eager, almost nervously anxious, 'you are like me. You are feeling the unfinished rooms on either side. That 's what it is. For a man you are very sensitive. You ought never to have come in here till everything was in perfect order. I oughtn't to have let you come. You have begun with a wrong impression. You dear old Theo!'—she smiled, raising her eyebrows a little—'you were always depressed—don't you remember?—when we arrived in the new places you were accredited to.'

'Was I? But I didn't say I was depressed now, Doloretta.'

"You are. And it was always so. I recollect perfectly well how miserable you were the first few days at the Hague.'

'Oh, the Hague!'

'And it was just the same at Tangier.'

'No, there you 're really wrong, Doloretta.'

He spoke decisively, and looked at her with a new, keen penetration.

'There you 're bluffing,' he said.

He came away from the fireplace.

'Bluffing!' she exclaimed, almost as if in anger.

'Yes.'

He sat down beside her on the sofa, after removing her hat and veil, and putting them on a table close by.

'Why are you trying to bluff?'

She looked down. Her long eyelashes showed against the beautiful pallor of her face. Her husband noticed them, and remembered how he had delighted in them when he first fell in love with Dolores. It had perhaps been very absurd, but he believed that he had first fallen in love with those long and curling eyelashes. They had seemed to mean—what? A whole world of delicious, sensitive, shrinking, promising womanliness as they showed against the soft cheeks. They had touched him, he remembered, in the innermost part of his nature; had stirred within him a protective instinct that was acquisitive and not wholly without brutality; they had filled him with the mysterious longings of a complete man, longings that come surely from God, and reach out towards God, and that make a man glow with a splendid wonder at himself, at the stirring of the strange living force which is his essence.

Now, as he looked at them, he still felt a tenderness, protectiveness, but he felt also a sense of frustration that was cold and almost terrible.

'What is the good of it?' he said after a pause.

Dolores still looked down in silence, without moving.

'Come with me,' said her husband, as if taking a sudden resolution.

He stretched out his brown, eager-looking hand, and took one of her hands, and got up. She obeyed his movement, and he led her through the beautiful, but still partially chaotic apartment, into the room that was to be his, the boudoir, the great dining-room, the hall, into their immense bedroom and the rooms for guests. In all, except in their bedroom and in the room they had quitted the furniture was not yet arranged. In some the curtains were not yet hung nor the carpets laid down.

'It's not ready! It's not in order, Theo!' Dolores kept murmuring. 'Wait a little! You must give me time, Theo!'

He said nothing, only clasped her hand more tightly and led her on.

'You oughtn't to have come in till everything was ready,' she said. 'I always knew it. I always knew!'

At last they returned to her drawing-room. Sir Theodore shut the door behind them.

'This room is ready, isn't it?' he said. 'Isn't it, Doloretta?'

'Yes,' she answered.

'And isn't it in just this room that one feels it most? Doesn't it cut into you most sharply, deeply, here?'

'Cut into you—what?'

For an instant there was the look almost of a supplicating slave in her small face.

'The truth, that we are failures, you and I, Doloretta.'

With an abrupt movement he sprang forward to the hearth where Nero, who had taken no notice of their departure or return, was still sitting in a humped position, looking egoistic and dull, caught the dog up by the scruff of his neck, and held him at arm's length towards Dolores.

'This is all we've got! Does this make a home for a man?' he said, almost with violence.

Nero struggled, writhed, coughed, blinked, and shed drops of sticky moisture from his bulging eyes.

'Look at it! All we've got, you and I, to make a home—after ten years!'

He dropped the now shrieking dog to the carpet.

'And each other, Theo? And our love?' almost whispered Dolores.

Over her white face a flush, that was like a flush of shame, had spread. Her husband stared at the carpet.

'Forgive me! Forgive me!' he said at last, slowly and without looking at his wife. 'But—I've been to Denzil's to-day, and . .

'I knew it!' said Dolores. 'I knew it!'

CHAPTER III

FRANCIS DENZIL had been Sir Theodore's best man when he and Dolores were married, and had himself been married six weeks later to Edna Massingham, a girl of whom it had been often said by her friends and acquaintances, 'Edna ought to get a good husband. She would make such a perfect wife and mother.' She had now fulfilled her destiny. She had wedded the man she loved and had become the mother of three children, a boy and two girls. Sir Theodore was the eldest child's, the boy's, godfather, and this adored firstborn had been called by his name.

Francis Denzil, like Sir Theodore, had entered the diplomatic service, but, unlike his friend, he had remained in it, and was now at the age of forty, Councillor of the British Embassy in Rome, after periods of service at Berlin, Paris, Belgrade, and other places. Although apparently a satisfactory, and certainly a clever and industrious diplomatist, Denzil lacked, or was thought by some to lack, more than one of the qualifications for complete success in the profession he had adopted. He cared little for society, and was by nature what the English sometimes call 'a home bird.' Simple and direct in manner he was uncompromising in

opinion. He was not supple or adaptable, never pretended to care for anything he did not like, however fashionable it might chance to be at the moment, and was so honest and genuine that the socially insincere thought him brusque. He hated cards, had given up dancing when he married, and never dreamed of flirting with his neighbour's wife. Although he did not wear glasses, and his grey eyes, set wide apart in his large head, looked as if they saw very well all that was going on around him, he was in reality short-sighted. This fact, which was unknown to most people, caused him to stare sometimes at those about him in a manner which disconcerted them, and which had earned for him the name of 'the basilisk.' In fulfilling what he regarded as his diplomatic duties he was indefatigable, but he did not seem to consider that among them was numbered the duty of being socially charming to those for whom he cared nothing, or of whom he actively disapproved. One fascinating woman, half Polish, half Sicilian, when the new Councillor was once being discussed in her presence by a coterie of Romans, had dismissed him with five words of mingled French and Italian, '*C'est un Anglais, e basta.*'

Mrs. Denzil was charming for both herself and her husband. She had loved and married him for his strong honesty and his absolute sincerity, and had ever since laid herself out to make up for his social shortcomings, which she seldom hinted at to him, and which she secretly adored.

She was not beautiful, and when beside a woman like Dolores looked plain, but everybody thought her, and called her, a charming woman. On her mother's side she was Italian and she was rather dark than fair, with a good figure, pretty hair, and graceful movements. But her features were irregular and indefinite, and she had one decided defect, a cast in the left eye. Somehow—for cannot the charming woman achieve the miraculous at will?—Mrs. Denzil became additionally attractive by reason of this defective eye. It appealed, and not in vain, to the hearts of both women and men. It gave to her face a look of exceptional, and tenderly odd naturalness, as if she gazed at you like that, *de travers*, because she knew you were really her friend and wouldn't mind. It established a sort of confidential relation with you, as a told secret may. Very few could resist it, but of

that fact Mrs. Denzil seemed quite unaware. She had no self-consciousness, and lived genuinely for, and in, others.

Denzil worshipped his wife and his children, but it is doubtful whether he realised how much the former was perpetually doing, without ostentation, to further his career. He was ambitious, and meant to rise to the top of his profession, and to be a successful ambassador. And he knew that his brains and his talents entitled him to succeed where others, far less clever than himself, had managed to avoid failure. But, with his nature, he could not perceive his shortcomings on the social side of life, and therefore could not see clearly how his wife, without ever acknowledging them, strove to cover them up. If he did a brusque thing to some one she did something charming to the same person. If he made a *gaffe*, as he occasionally did, she acted the repentance which seldom dawned in his mind or heart. If he, being short-sighted, passed some one whom he did not specially approve of, and who had fallen among thieves, by on the other side, she played the part of the good Samaritan and was liberal with the oil and wine and the money for the landlord.

The Denzils were not very well off for people in diplomacy, and therefore, having three angels, they were obliged to be careful. And here again Mrs. Denzil did wonders without letting them be known. She practised an economy that was as secret as if it had been criminal. And this virtue in her was the more gracious, because she was naturally open-handed. So was her husband. But whereas he often gave way to his impulse, and for that was praised and admired, Mrs. Denzil usually did secret violence to hers, and, but for her charm and clever privacy, might have been considered close and contriving. As it was she just escaped, and was only dubbed by a few English 'an admirable manager,' and by some Italians '*una buona donna di casa*.'

She was always well though quietly dressed, and always perfectly *coiffée*; but no one ever saw her in a really expensive gown, except perhaps now and then at a Court ball; and she had never worn a hat that cost as much as five pounds, unless some relation had given it to her.

Of the three children who had increased and fortified the Denzils' love, Theodore, the eldest, was eight years and some

months old, Iris was six, and Viola was three. Theodore resembled his mother in one important respect. He was plain, but so charming that no one ever thought coldly about his looks, or 'picked them to pieces.' His little nose was not very well formed, but it looked so innocent, and turned up slightly above such a kind and trustful small mouth, and below a pair of such sincere and friendly brown eyes, that most of the boy Theo's friends would have been shocked and grieved had it abruptly become Grecian. His hair was brown and quite straight, and often hung down near his eyes. He was very slight, a mere wisp of a boy, but agile, gentle but plucky, and extremely considerate of the feelings of others. Indeed in a child his thoughtfulness for those around him was almost uncanny. It was, perhaps, this trait in her little son that Mrs. Denzil most loved. As to his brains they were almost as good as his heart. He was quick-witted, very ardent and imaginative, and full of fire. And he had a marked sense of what was dramatic.

Iris was a serious child, short-sighted like her father, and staring somewhat in his manner. She was kindly but rather deliberate, and liked to sum people up before she admitted them within the golden circle of her confidence. When with those she did not care about she sometimes had an air of boredom that was comic. Her father called her 'the female diplomatist,' and declared that he often took her opinion when he was doubtful about any point connected with foreign policy, and that she always guided him aright. She was pretty and fair, rather massive, and had a will of iron, which could, however, be made almost as wax by music, to which she was fervently devoted. As wax melts before a hot fire so would the iron will of Iris melt before a tune. She always looked the picture of health, and had never had a serious illness.

Little Viola was more like her brother, but she was less fiery and dramatic than he was, and occasionally indulged in languors that seemed wilful. Her father said that she gave herself airs, but he loved her airs. She had less will than Iris, but more quickness of mind and more charm. By accommodating herself to people she attracted them to her, and established an ascendancy over them, whereas Iris appeared to wish for a worthy circle of friends who would

suit themselves to her without giving her trouble. Iris had something of the judge in her composition. Viola much of the siren.

Of these three children, Theodore had been born in Paris, Iris in Belgrade, Viola in Athens. Theodore already spoke three languages—English, French, and Italian; the last not well. And he and his sisters were quite cosmopolitan.

Although Mrs. Denzil understood the art of dress, and was full of natural charm, she was not a woman of much knowledge, and had something of the average Italian's carelessness and ignorance in all matters connected with houses, their decoration and arrangement. She did not put up white lace curtains in front of her windows, and pin photographs and picture postcards on them, or set Japanese fans in the grate, but she had little of that sense of the beauty and comfort desirable in living rooms which is characteristic of most modern Englishwomen in her class of life.

Although her father had been an Englishman she was on the whole more Italian than English, and she showed this in many ways, among them in this lack of the English sense of household cosiness and beauty. She was careful to have a good cook, and was never untidy. But she did not mind combinations of colour that would have rendered life hideous to Dolores, and an arrangement of furniture so formal as to chill her to the bone. Francis Denzil had better taste in these respects than his wife, but he was the type of man who leaves these things to the woman if he has one in his life. He always took Edna's advice when they had to choose a new abode. And as he left to her the engaging of servants, the selecting of clothes for the children, and the leaving of cards, so he left to her the arrangement of furniture, the placing of cushions, and the decoration of rooms. Only in his own sitting-room did he allow himself a free hand. And his free hand meant plenty of newspapers, books, and cigars, a very large writing-table, capacious chairs, and a window thrown wide open.

Sir Theodore and Denzil had been friends from their youth, although there was a difference of ten years in their ages. Their families lived in the same county, Worcestershire. The fact that both had chosen the same profession had perhaps drawn them more closely together. But it

had also often put leagues of space between them. Never since their respective marriages had they been accredited to the same embassy. And so it had chanced that till Sir Theodore retired the intercourse between the friends and their wives had been rare, and had taken place in England during periods of leave.

Dolores had never regretted this. She admired Edna Denzil's character. She respected her. She even felt her charm and liked her; but she wished to be far away from her. For Mrs. Denzil was the fruitful and she was the barren vine. It tortured Dolores to see the happy Denzil household, to return from it to her own empty and silent interior. It tortured her still more to know that her husband saw it, compared the one home with the other, compared his—the barren vine—with his friend's vine that was fruitful.

Mrs. Denzil had the boy Theo, Iris, and Viola. She, Dolores, had—some dog.

When, a year ago, Sir Theodore had retired, he and his wife had come to Rome for the winter, partly because Rome was a delightful city to winter in, but partly also because Denzil was Councillor of the British Embassy. Dolores had not liked to resist her husband's suggestion that they should pass six months in Rome. She was a very sensitive woman, but she was also, despite her almost clinging femininity, a proud woman. And she thought that jealousy was the most humiliating of the mental and affectional afflictions of poor humanity. To feel jealousy was to feel as if one were being rolled in the dust. To show jealousy! That was to summon the world to look at your degradation.

So the Cannynges came to Rome and stayed in the Grand Hotel for the winter.

From the first week of their arrival Dolores dated the beginning for her of a period of secret misery, which seemed to increase day by day till it held her in a cold grip that was like a grip of iron.

Naturally Sir Theodore, now released from work, saw a great deal of his friend, Denzil. Naturally he was often in Denzil's flat in the Via Venti Settembre. And there he was greeted by little voices, was made a slave by little tyrants. There he found the family, which at the Grand

Hotel was represented by Apache, a bull terrier, the predecessor of Nero. Sir Theodore was one of those men in whom the natural instinct of man to reproduce his species was almost a passion. He loved children, and, because of that, children loved him. They went to him at once, as a puppy goes to a dog lover, with perfect confidence and almost in a hurry, intent on sympathy and petting. And, of course, they got both. He understood children. And he meant with all his soul to have children of his own. And Sir Theodore's meaning was no slight thing. In his nature there was much intensity. Even his hands showed that to the keen observer. He had Celtic and Latin blood in his veins, Irish and Cornish strains, and French blood through his mother.

Yet he did not marry till he was forty.

This delay was caused by his strong hold upon the genuine, the central things of life. He was not a man who could marry merely in order to have children. Perfect children, such as he desired, could only spring, he believed, from the strong love of a man and a woman, must be the beautiful effect of a beautiful cause. In his youth he loved, and he loved tragically. His fiancée was burnt to death at a Christmas-tree party three weeks before the day fixed for his wedding. Fourteen years passed by before he again lighted his torch at the sacred fire. He met Dolores, then a mere girl, in Paris, where she was passing a few weeks of the spring with her parents, and where he was attached to the British Embassy. He fell deeply in love with her.

Sir Theodore was one of those mercurial warm-blooded and highly intelligent men who remain always young and ardent. At thirty-nine he was more fascinating than most of the gay youths who were dancing, flirting and proposing in Paris. He completely captivated Dolores, and, when she was just under twenty and he was just forty, they were married. Both thought that they were entering a Paradise which was the anteroom to Heaven. And for a time they dwelt in Paradise. But when they sought to pass on they found that the door which opened to the Denzils remained firmly closed against them. For a long time they beat at that door. Then at last they recoiled. And were they still in Paradise? Neither ever asked the other. And

their silence gradually became like a cloud which enveloped them.

Never had it been broken until that evening when Sir Theodore, returning from a visit to the Denzils where he had been playing with the children, found Dolores alone with Nero in their unfinished apartment. That evening the cloud was split asunder as by lightning.

Such an outburst from her husband was unprecedented. Yet it did not surprise Dolores. On the contrary, it seemed to her inevitable. It seemed to her as if the previous winter they had passed in Rome, as if the days of this subsequent autumn, had been but a prolonged preparation for her husband's cry as he held the writhing dog towards her.

For fourteen years Theo had foregone the chance of having children because of his secret romance, had curbed his great desire lest he should stumble blindly into the second best, which is the shadow of love. Knowing the ardour of his temperament Dolores knew what that period of waiting must have cost him.

And since then he had waited ten years.

So long as he had remained in diplomacy he had maintained a strong hold on the zest and the glory of life. For he was a man with ambition, and had a quick intellect as well as an eager heart. Even when he had left the diplomatic service, in a fit of irritation and disappointment brought on by his not receiving the post at Vienna which he considered his due, he had not seen quite clearly, perhaps, the failure of his life. But Dolores had known that he would see it, that a day must come when the last covering would be stripped away and the naked truth appear. She had been dreading the dawning of that day, she had made desperate efforts to delay its arrival, had striven to fill Theo's life, to occupy his mind, to entertain his intellect, to find food for his attention. But when he was not with her, and she knew he was at the Denzils', she felt the advance of the moment she feared, and she tried to brave herself to encounter it. Women often know what must come when men do not, and women who love deeply know best of all. Dolores loved her husband deeply, and she had long realised what effect the intercourse with the Denzils must have upon him. Nevertheless the egoism of his cry had cut her to the quick.

Her heart seemed to be laid bare, abruptly, ruthlessly. She gazed at it and shuddered. And that vision had drawn from her the murmur, almost a sigh, in which for a moment pride was submerged by love. Then as her husband asked mechanically for forgiveness, and almost simultaneously seemed to seek justification by his mention of the Denzils, Dolores spoke her three words, took up her hat and veil, and went quietly out of the room.

'Forgive me! Forgive me!' Her husband's exclamation still rang in her ears. But she knew that what he was trying to do in his heart was this: he was trying to forgive her for never having borne him a child.

That was what ten years of devotion to her husband had ended in. That was the reward of her love.

As she opened the door and came into their big bedroom—new home of their married life—she felt physically numb. She put away the hat and veil, and remained standing in the middle of the room.

After all, what difference could words make between Theo and her? The silence had been speaking for years.

Dolores said that to herself. But she knew that the words just spoken had made an immense difference. Never again could her relation with Theo be exactly what it had been until now.

A small sound made her start. She turned sharply and listened. She had shut the bedroom door behind her. The sound had seemed to come from there.

After a pause it came again. And this time she knew what it was. Nero was scratching at the door.

CHAPTER IV

THAT night the Cannynges were dining out with some English friends in the Via Gregoriana, and they did not meet till the carriage was at the door. When Sir Theodore came out of his dressing-room, arranging a white silk handkerchief round his dark throat, and carrying a soft black

hat, Dolores met him as if nothing had happened to disturb their usual relations. He touched her shoulder gently.

'*What a pretty cloak, Doloretta!*' he said.

'Do you think so?'

'One of the prettiest you have ever had. You should always wear the deep colours that one can look down into. They seem to carry on your beauty, to complete a scheme. Nothing shallow belongs to you. I wonder whom we shall meet to-night.'

He helped her carefully into the carriage.

So the long silence that, like a cloud, had lifted for a moment, closed round them again.

Dolores had felt sure that it would be so. Her husband was essentially well-bred. She had known, as she thought over their situation while she was dressing, that when he was alone and grew calm, he would consider his sudden outburst as a lapse from his ideal of conduct. She had been almost certain that he would try to atone for it.

As the carriage descended the hill to the Piazza she was thankful she had married a subtle man. A blunderer might have entered into apologies and explanations. She could not have endured that. In her present condition of nerves she must have unfastened the carriage door and jumped out had any such probe been inserted into her wound.

But though in that moment Dolores was thankful, as she entered once more into the silence long afterwards, remembering that short drive over the pavements of Rome, she thought it would have been far better if she and Theo had acted at that crisis in their lives as more vulgar, and less sensitive people would probably have acted, if they had opened their hearts to each other, had said and shown all that there was to be said and shown.

But they had had to act according to their characters and their traditions, she supposed. Their freedom had been as the freedom of those animals in the open-air menagerie at Hamburg, greater than that of the creatures in the cage, but how far less than that of the creatures in the forest. She longed to go away at once from Rome. If she had acted according to impulse she would have tried to persuade her husband to let their apartment, and she would have taken him travelling over the world to wonderful lands he had not

yet seem. She would, perhaps, have played a comedy, such as is easily played by the clever, not too scrupulous woman, have pretended to break down in health, and persuaded a doctor to order her away. But there was a certain native sincerity in her character. It added to her charm in the opinion of many people, among whom was her husband. But it occasionally fought against her worldly interests. She resigned herself to living in Rome, and resolved, in that first moment of bitter contriving, to use her woman's arts more earnestly to make Theo forget the truth which he had so abruptly proclaimed, that their married life was a failure because it had not been blessed by children. Next day she gave Nero away, and she wrote a note to Lady Sarah asking her to come and see the apartment in the Palazzo Barberini.

But Lady Sarah had been called to Naples by the illness of a little Italian protégée there, whom she had found abandoned, and on the edge of the life of the abyss, and whom she had set up in business as a laundress. She wrote that she hoped to be back in Rome on the following Friday morning, and would come in the afternoon of that day. Dolores, who was in that condition of nervous excitement which demands imperiously to be fed with action, was disproportionately disappointed, was even absurd enough to feel almost angry with Lady Sarah. And now that she knew the latter could not come before Friday she realised that she had especially wanted, even needed, to see her by Thursday, the day of Countess Boccara's dinner at the Grand Hotel. However, there was nothing to be done. She wrote fixing Friday afternoon for Lady Sarah's visit, and then she set actively to work to get the apartment thoroughly arranged and in perfect order.

Into this business she threw herself with an energy that was almost feverish, and she involved Sir Theodore in it, too. That was not difficult, for he was a man who really cared about beauty in his home, and understood how it could be created. And that desire of the gentleman within him to atone for his lapse from his long silence persisted, and made him very gentle, very gallant with Dolores, anxious to please, perhaps to comfort her in the days that immediately followed that revelation of his bitterness.

She thought he was really interested in all they were doing, and her heart grew a little lighter, and she said to herself that perhaps her fears had been exaggerated, her anxiety, almost terror, about the future unfounded. But there is a sound in a man's voice at certain moments that cannot be misinterpreted by a woman—the sound of his inmost heart. Dolores had heard it. She would never be able to forget it.

By Thursday morning the apartment had been transformed and was, as Dolores expressed it, 'livable,' though there were still many last touches to be added, and no doubt by degrees Theo and she would pick up many beautiful things to make it more attractive. So busy had they been that Sir Theodore had apparently never found time to notice the disappearance of Nero. At any rate he had never alluded to it. Dolores thought at first that he was not aware that the dog had been got rid of, then that he knew it but did not care to speak of it, for fear of recalling that horrible evening. But on Thursday, when they felt that they might rest from their labours, Sir Theodore said:

'What 's become of the Egoist, Doloretta?'

'The Egoist?'

'Nero!'

'I've given him away, to Etta Albano,' she answered, looking down. 'She was longing to have him, and the servants didn't like him. They said he was spoiling the furniture and the curtains. 'I didn't want to have a fuss with new servants, so I thought it best to get rid of him.'

She spoke quite naturally, and her figure looked very calm as she stood near one of the tall windows lit up by the bright sun of the November morning. A tender, and yet a very sad look came into her husband's bright eyes, but he only said:

'I think you were wise, Doloretta. Let us look out for a dog less rare and less conscious of his rarity; shall we?'

'Oh, I don't know, Theo. I think perhaps we 'd better do without a dog at all. We 'll see later. There 's plenty of time. And there 's so much to do in Rome that really a dog might be rather a nuisance here. You know how tiresome it was about Apache at the Grand.'

'Yes, but here we are at home. And I know you love dogs.'

'I 'm not sure that I do. But there 's plenty of time to think about it. By the way, did I tell you I 've arranged to dine with Madeleine Boccara to-night as you're going to the Embassy.'

Sir Theodore slightly twisted his face, rather as he had when, coming in from the Denzils, he had seen Nero enthroned before the fire.

'The little Boccara! Do you really like her, Dolores?'

'Yes. She amuses me, and she 's a kind little thing.'

'I don't doubt it. Who 's to be there?'

'She didn't tell me.'

'Not her husband, I imagine,' said Sir Theodore, with a light sarcasm.

'No, he is not coming.'

'Poor Boccara! He 's a fool, and has never done a stroke of honest work in his life. But I pity him.'

'Why?'

'Imagine a good, honest, normal, if stupid, man married to a human being that lives solely for its diabolical waist.'

'Ts!'

'Oh, I speak advisedly. There 's very little of the true she-dom we men adore in the waist worshipper, who immolates—immolates on the unfragrant altar erected to the great god Vanity.'

'What does Madeleine Boccara immolate?'

'Dolores, you know as well as I do.'

Dolores slightly reddened, and there was a moment of silence.

'Boccara's peccadilloes are many,' Sir Theodore said at last. 'But if sins are ever forgiven, I think his will be. He shouldn't have gone to Paris for a wife.'

There the conversation ended.

In the evening, just before Dolores went to dress, her husband said to her:

'What do you say to asking the Denzils in to dine on Sunday night to bless our roof-tree?'

He spoke as if half jocosely, to cover—she felt sure—a note of doubt in his deep and melodious voice.

'Of course,' she answered quickly, 'I want them to see all we have done.'

She slightly hesitated. Then she added:

'Do you want to have them alone?'

'Have you any one else in mind?'

'I only thought we might ask Lady Sarah Ides.'

'Old Lady Sally? Of course! She's a good sort. Her hat may be in the wrong, but her heart's in the right place. We'll ask her blessing too.'

'Thank you, Theo.'

She went away rather slowly to dress.

Sir Theodore had started for the British Embassy some time before Dolores was ready. His dinner was at eight. As she came into the drawing-room instinctively she looked towards the fire, and she found herself missing Nero. Now that the apartment was finished, now that she was quite alone in it at night, she had time to miss the dog. Perhaps, after all, she would have to get another dog. The servant came to say the carriage was at the door.

'I will come in five minutes,' she said.

It was time to go. Yet she lingered. All day long a faint disinclination to go to this dinner had beset her. With the falling of darkness it had grown stronger. It was no longer faint. Suppose she sent the carriage with a note to say she felt ill, had a cold, a headache, and could not come? Madeleine Boccani would be furious. But would that matter very much? She went to the writing-table, sat down and took up a pen. Leaning her elbow on the table, and keeping the pen in her hand, she turned her little head and looked again towards the hearth. If only there had been a dog sitting before it, she would have written that note, and stayed at home to-night. But she had not the courage to remain quite alone. Denzil would be dining at the Embassy. Perhaps Theo would go back to the flat in the Via Venti Settembre after the dinner to smoke a cigar. Perhaps he would go softly into certain rooms, to look at three little sleepers, to listen to the soft and regular breathing that stirred through the happy night three little innocent bosoms.

Dolores dropped the pen, drew her cloak round her, and went down to the carriage.

The little Countess was waiting for her in the white hall surrounded by several people, nearly all of them Sicilians who had come to spend part of the season in Rome, and who would return to Palermo for the late spring. Her figure, encased in a white and gold gown of some fragile material that fitted, it seemed, rather closer than a skin, looked more astonishing than ever. As, taking tiny steps, for her skirt was tied closely in behind, and appeared to be persistently embracing her high little heels, she came to meet Dolores, all the women in the room regarded her waist, that marvellous waist to which her existence was dedicated. Their faces showed concentrated interest, combined surely with reluctant admiration. One of them, a beautiful dark woman, with heavy eyes which looked full of sultry and brooding things, as she gazed, put up her right hand to her own waist, and, drawing herself up, stood very erect. Her husband, a handsome Baron, with a keen and wandering eye, was just coming into the room. She had given him a splendid son, to bear his title in due time, and to carry on his line, but—he had a keen and wandering eye.

'*Cara*,' said Countess Boccara, holding the hand of Dolores with gentle persistence, and looking at her face, her hair, her jewels, her gown, with eyes that gathered knowledge with the fearful celerity of the Parisienne. 'I did not think you would come to-night, so now I thank the Padre Eterno.'

'But why should I not come?' said Dolores, feeling almost guilty as she remembered her hesitation at the writing-table.

'I do not know. But I scarcely thought you would.'

She let go the hand of Dolores.

'Are we dining with all these people?' Dolores asked, looking towards the group of Sicilians. 'I thought you said——'

'No, no. We are only four. A man for you and a man for me. Ecco! Come, let us sit down.'

'And who are our men?' asked Dolores, when they were ensconced, she in an armchair, Countess Boccara in a hard chair on which she sat bolt upright.

'Mine is Montebruno.'

'Do you mean Marchese Giorgio Montebruno who——

'Has only one mistress—the gaming table,' interposed the Countess. 'Yes, it is he. Do you like him?'

'I scarcely know him. And mine?'

'Guess!'

'I cannot.'

'Whom of all the men in Rome would you like best to meet to-night?'

Dolores slightly moved her slender shoulders, and her soft lips looked faintly arrogant.

'Barring your beautiful husband,' added the Countess with malice.

'Why all this mystery about a mere man?' asked Dolores with serene indifference.

Countess Boccara looked at her in silence for a minute. Then she said:

'It is Cesare Carelli.'

'Oh.'

The unmeaning word was absolutely colourless as it came from the lips of Dolores.

'Here he is,' added the Countess. 'And there is Monte-bruno in the lobby.'

A strongly built but graceful man of about thirty was coming quietly towards them, with the complete ease and lack of self-consciousness characteristic of well-bred Italians. Neither tall nor short he was intensely masculine in appearance. Some men seem far more male than others, as some women seem far more female than other women. An atmosphere of sex surrounds them. Cesare Carelli was one of these almost violently male men. Yet he often looked gentle and kind, was what Italians call very '*simpatico*,' and had not a trace of 'swagger' or of conscious conceit. His complexion was clear and colourless. He had a round white forehead, a splendidly shaped and small head, covered with black and curly hair which, though cut very short, was so thick that it looked almost unnatural, dense black eyebrows, and a pair of the shining and intense black eyes which are seen so often in Rome; eyes which cannot look dull, cannot look inexpressive, but which, perhaps, often seem to mean more than they really do mean, more of passion, of melancholy, of violence or of reverie. He had a rather large mouth closely shut when his face was in repose, with splendid,

not small, teeth, and a firmly modelled chin with a cleft down the middle. In the shape of his forehead and in his eyes there was something that suggested intellectuality, yet his face as a whole was the face of a man of action, who was intelligent, rather than of a thinker or a student. He could look very gay, even impudent, but often looked calm, with intensity behind the calm. His figure was that of a very supple and athletic man, and he wore clothes that had certainly been cut in London.

As he came up he smiled with an air of content, and mechanically smoothed his black moustache with a strong and well-shaped hand slightly browned by the sun.

He greeted the Countess in the usual Italian way, bending and touching, or appearing to touch, her left hand with his lips as he held it gently in his. Then he turned to Dolores and saluted her in the same manner.

'*Ben tornata*,' he said, in a soft, but strong tenor voice.

'But I have been in Rome some time,' said Dolores.

In excellent English he replied:

'I did not know it. I have been in the country, at my father's place in Lombardy, and at the lakes.'

At this moment the Countess's 'man' Montebruno, came up.

He was much older than Cesare Carelli, and very much plainer. Thin, with sloping shoulders, and a tall and bony frame, he had a face that strongly resembled that of a weary bloodhound, with bloodshot, strained eyes, and drooping, puckered cheeks and lips. His domed forehead was covered with lines, which kept moving when he talked, almost as if each one were endowed with a separate and feverish life of its own. His head was partially bald, and he had large, yellowish white ears, which always looked fatigued and pendulous. He had no hair on his face. Despite his strange, and almost repulsive appearance he was aristocratic looking and dominating. In his expression there was that lurking sadness peculiar to men who are the bond slaves to some vice, a sadness as of the soul contemplating itself impotently within the dark shadow of its temple.

Montebruno was never known to smile, but he could make others smile. He was a true fatalist, and would follow his star to the dark or the devil.

Countess Boccara, who would probably have pined and died if she had not been perpetually *en vue*, had engaged a table in the middle of the restaurant, which could be raked by the glances of every one. Here her figure could be seen to the very best advantage, while she nibbled at a sole and some *petits pois*, sipped some Vichy water, and entertained her guests, for whom she had taken care to order a perfect little dinner. Montebruno sat at her left hand, and contemplated her with his yellow eyes which seldom changed in expression. He was a great friend of the Countess, and indeed of nearly every smart woman in Rome. Why exactly they found him attractive no one knew. He could be amusing, but often was not. He never entertained, being separated from his wife and for ever in money difficulties. He had the reputation of being *mauvaise langue*, and was extremely selfish. Nevertheless he had multitudes of friends. Possibly his gambling feats, which had a European notoriety, made a halo around him. To-night he seemed dreary. He began to eat his dinner with determination, but for a time said very little, except when he criticised the food. Countess Boccara did not appear at first to notice his depression. She rattled on, keeping the conversation general; but presently she devoted herself entirely to him. His voice was thin and harsh. She lowered hers, and soon they were talking earnestly in undertones. For a moment she looked across to Dolores and Carelli and said:

'He 's explaining a system to me. I 'm going to Monte Carlo for Christmas.'

Then she sipped her Vichy water, cast a quick glance round the restaurant to see who was watching her, and again devoted herself to Montebruno.

Dolores felt secretly ill at ease, but she was too much accustomed to the world to show it. There was something in Montebruno which she disliked, though she scarcely knew what it was. Possibly it was his appearance which made her shrink from him. When she looked away from him to Carelli she realised how great is the dominion of a woman's eyes over her mind. Carelli's face and figure, his strong, manly expression and completely natural manner, pleased nearly all women. His mother was English, and though in appearance he was thoroughly, even strikingly Italian, the

Latin temperament inherited from his father was modified to a certain extent by the Anglo-Saxon strain in his blood. Indeed Princess Carelli often said that Cesare was more English than she was. A naturally indolent woman, with none of the English sporting instincts, after her marriage she had rapidly become Italianised. Her languor, her graceful indifference had increased. She had soon given up visiting England, and never went further away from Rome, or her husband's country place, than Paris. Even her point of view had become almost completely Italian. Upon moral questions she had, or affected to have, the Roman outlook. And English respectability and reserve—thought by most Italians to be either a national hypocrisy, or a funny mannerism unsupported by acts of abnegation—invariably, if brought to her notice, drew from her some languidly cynical remark. With such a mother, and with a father completely Roman, Cesare's science could hardly be English. And it certainly was not. Yet now and then he suggested the Englishman. A touch almost of bluffness fortified his grace. His ease of manner was tempered by a passing hauteur. Or a cloud that had surely floated from the other side of the Channel obscured for an instant the shining fire of his eyes.

Dolores, who had known Carelli in Rome during the previous winter, having met him out hunting and at many parties, and who also knew his mother, liked these English suggestions. Although she had never seen very much of Carelli she had felt friendly towards him, had even felt a curious confidence in him. But towards the close of the Roman season this confidence had been disturbed, this friendly feeling had been not destroyed but slightly shaken. For Carelli had come to know of Sir Theodore's assiduity in visiting the Denzils, and had drawn from it conclusions wholly Italian. And these conclusions had led him to show to Dolores the fact that she meant something to him that the other women in Rome did not mean. He had said nothing. For the ordinary compliments considered by Italians to be due to all charming women of course did not count. But—she knew. And he had intended her to know. At first, though she had been surprised, she had not really cared either way. She had been too indifferent, too entirely

free of all feeling for Carelli even to be angry for more than a few minutes. But in the summer, during her absence from Rome with her husband, strangely this indifference had been replaced by an uneasiness, a definite anxiety, which grew up, it seemed, miraculously within her, like a plant growing without roots. For she heard nothing of Carelli; had no communication from him. He might be dead and she might not know, would not be distressed if she did know. She said that to herself, and could not account for her change in feeling about him. Sometimes she almost felt as if, with the force of an unusual strength, he flung influence upon her from afar. It was not that now she liked him better. All her power of affection was centred upon her husband, and she was not the sort of woman who could ever have a mere physical caprice.

What troubled her was this. She gradually, in absence, began mysteriously to know that Carelli might have a certain effect upon her life. Whence this knowledge came she could not tell, and, for this reason, it infected her spirit with something that was almost akin to fear. When the little Countess had asked her to dinner she had known at once it was to meet Carelli. The Countess had gaiety instead of morals, loved intrigue, and quite light-heartedly amused herself by what she called 'causing crescendos.' She delighted in mischievously furthering a naughty love affair so long as it did not in any way interfere with herself. Though vain she had no real temperament. That was why poor Boccara looked so *dépaysé*, every one said. And she rather liked Dolores. So she thought she would cause a crescendo in the lives of Dolores and Cesare. And now she talked in an under-voice to Montebruno, and peacefully hoped for the worst.

'Of course you are going to hunt again this season,' said Cesare. He was looking bold and strong, and health was enthroned in the clear Roman pallor of his firm cheeks. 'Can I help you at all in picking up your horses? Why not come out with the Bracciano staghounds as well as the fox-hounds this winter? Or are two days a week enough for you?'

'Too much,' said Dolores, holding firm to the abrupt resolve she had come to that day at the Excelsior.

'Too much?'

His black eyes fixed themselves upon her, but their expression did not alter.

'Yes, I am not going to hunt this season.'

Cesare did not look surprised or annoyed. Without speaking he continued to gaze at Dolores. And she, as if he had put a question, continued:

'Moving into our apartment has been very expensive. We have had to do so much. So I must practise economy. And hunting is not economical, is it?'

'Economy is horrid,' remarked Cesare, 'especially in Rome.'

'But I have another reason,' said Dolores, turning towards him a little more.

'I thought you had.'

'I don't think you could guess what it is.'

'I never even try to guess what are the reasons of ladies. They are too mysterious.'

'This winter I want to know more of the intellectual and artistic side of Rome. It is all very well for Romans to hunt and play bridge and dance all the time. They have seen everything—or if they haven't, they don't want to. But we foreigners—it is folly for us to come to Rome, and to live there exactly as if we were in Cannes or Monte Carlo, or any other gay place that has a banal season. Rome must be so wonderful.'

'Must be! Don't you know its wonders?'

'Not really. But as we are going to settle down here more or less I mean to know them.'

'Will you let me help you?'

'I daresay you are a very good lead out hunting, but I don't know whether you would be a good Cicerone. Besides, I have one.'

'Ah, your husband, no doubt!'

'Oh no.'

Cesare's face slightly darkened and his eyes looked heavy and morose. But he said nothing, only lifted his glass and sipped his champagne. Then, putting his glass down, he remarked, with a stiffness that suggested England:

'Take care not to catch cold in the churches and museums. They are dangerous in the winter-time.'

'And the cold in the Campagna when one is waiting about for hounds to throw off?'

Suddenly Carelli's face became animated and his eyes shone.

'Ah! The Campagna!' he said.

That was all; but his eyes, his voice, the gesture he made, told a history.

'And you,' he added, 'will you give up the Campagna for the Catacombs, for the Grottos decorated with the bones of dead Cappuccini?'

He hesitated, gazing at her: then just as she was about to speak, as if moved by something irresistible, he added:

'But perhaps the Cicerone of Rome is much cleverer, much more entertaining, than the poor jackasses who love the winds and the spaces, and the sound of galloping hoofs across the grass. Is it so?'

Dolores thought of Lady Sarah, with blue gauze and her toque pushed awry.

'Chi lo sa? You may have met her.'

'Her!' said Cesare.

There was something almost childish in the emphasis he put on the word.

'Lady Sarah Ides.'

'I have never met her. But what does that matter?' I feel that she will be a good Cicerone, quite perfect, one to be trusted, and followed to the death or the Colosseum.'

'What 's that about the Colosseum?' interrupted the little Countess. 'It always interests me because I've never seen it. I only know it by all the *potins* one hears about it from the poor dears with introductions who are passing through Rome. It is *in casa* to them every day.'

She had apparently grasped Montebruno's 'system,' for she now once more made conversation general. Montebruno, on whom food and wine, extremely fastidious though he was about both, never seemed to make any effect, and who was therefore quite as likely to be amusing before dinner as he was to be dull after it, had perhaps received a hint from the Countess that she wished him to exert himself. For he now hazarded several shots at the reputations of Rome.

It seemed that he had recently been in Paris, and had there come across more than one pretty woman well known

in Rome buying gowns which would not have been supplied had not long-standing accounts been settled just in the nick of time, that is to say, just when the new modes were coming in. The settling of these accounts gave Montebruno the opportunity for his shots. For the husbands of the pretty women had not loosened their purse strings.

The little Countess entered eagerly into the discussion of the subject, which was one after her own heart. She never had any compunction in showing her total lack of moral sense, and equally complete lack of hypocrisy. She believed that all reasonable human beings devoted their efforts to securing to themselves a good time, and directed the shafts of her Gallic irony against those only who endeavoured to conceal those efforts and pretend to anything else.

As Dolores listened to the conversation, in which she and Cesare ~~only took~~ enough part to give the others the necessary cues, she felt strangely isolated in that deep love which she bore to her husband. Such a love was surely more than unfashionable in Rome, it was almost ridiculous. Were she to fall in love with Cesare Cardi nearly all the women she knew in Rome would think her admirably normal, would even feel, perhaps, a sort of sisterly sympathy with her. She would not be isolated then. But, after ten years of married life at close quarters, to be in love with her husband! To be secretly tortured because he liked to visit and play with another woman's children! Who would sympathise with such nonsense as that?

Dolores had lived much and intimately in what is called the great world, and was accustomed to the modern habit of speaking frankly of all sorts of things which used not to be publicly discussed in mixed companies. She knew that women whose private lives were impeccable were often the most startlingly outspoken. Nevertheless this civilised brutality nearly always grated upon her, because it gave her, despite her knowledge, a stupid feeling as if almost everyone who was any one was more or less a 'bad lot.' Secretly she was sensitive enough to feel as if speech and action were almost the same thing. And she was a naturally pure-minded, though a clinging and passionate woman. To-night, suddenly, while Countess Boccara chattered, Montebruno

fired at the human pigeons he carefully released from his traps, and she and Cesare smiled and appeared to approve, she felt as if a cold wave floated over her. She longed to escape from society, and the prospect of the Roman season almost appalled her. Her inner emotional life rendered her unfit for the life of her world. She knew that, and she felt as if soon every one must know it. In his harsh thin voice Montebruno pronounced a sarcasm at the expense of a well-known woman, whose lover, faithful for many years, had suddenly shown a strong inclination to be freed from his bonds.

'She is surprised, not that he has stayed so long, but that he wants to go now. But she has always been afflicted with an insidious malady.'

'What malady?' asked the Countess, curiously.

'The heart-paralysis called by some fidelity.'

'Do you think fidelity a malady?'

All the lines in Montebruno's high forehead were busily at work.

'The paralysed body cannot move from one room to another. The paralysed heart cannot move from one love to another. It is condemned to one love as the paralysed body is condemned to one room.'

'Then surely it is to be pitied?' said Dolores.

'There is not much room in life for pity,' returned Montebruno, fixing his bloodshot eyes upon her.

She shivered.

'Is there a draught where you are sitting, *cara*?' asked Countess Boccara.

'I think there must be. But I don't know where it comes from,' she answered.

'Let us go and sit in the hall. We will have coffee and smoke our cigarettes there.'

She got up.

When they were in the hall she said to Montebruno:

'Do order the coffee, and you, Cesare, light your cigar. Lady Cannynge and I are going to have five dreadful dull minutes all by ourselves, as the women do after dinners in England. Come, *cara*, to be bored.'

She led Dolores away to a little distance, and they sat down on a sofa. Then she said confidentially:

'Did you notice that Carelli said nothing when Montebruno was speaking about Anna Marsina and Poalo Cillia?'

'Yes. He didn't seem much interested.'

'Montebruno is malicious. That is why he told us to-night about the ending of that love. It was all meant for Carelli.'

'What has Carelli to do with it?'

'He has lately done what Cillia is trying to do.'

The Countess's red-brown eyes were gazing at Dolores.

'I don't understand.'

'You know that Carelli is thirty years old?'

'Is he?'

'Just over thirty. And he has never married. The old Princess found several people for him with excellent dots, and two were quite passable looking into the bargain. But he would not marry.'

'Why should he?'

'It is usual in Italy, especially for an only son.'

'Perhaps he was not in love,' said Dolores, with a purposeful vagueness, glancing about the big room.

She felt the Countess's small, but arbitrary hand on her arm.

'He was in love. That was why.'

'Really. How pretty Princess Bartoldi is! I think Sicilians——'

'So do I. Carelli has belonged for twelve years, since he was eighteen, to the Manelli. And he has broken with her, as Cillia wishes to break with Anna Marsina. All Rome knows it.'

The Countess's hand felt more arbitrary upon the arm of Dolores.

'What can be the reason, *cara*? I am full of curiosity.'

'I am not. The complicated love affairs of Rome seem to me very uninteresting,' said Dolores, with a touch of genuine disgust in her voice. But the Countess was not to be put off thus.

'In Rome such things do not happen without some good reason, as they do in Paris,' she went on. 'The men here have a certain tradition. Carelli must be deeply in love with another woman, or he would never have bothered to

break with the Mancelli. A Roman does not easily get rid of a habit which has lasted for twelve years.'

'Very likely he intends to marry,' said Dolores carelessly.

She longed almost fiercely to stop this conversation. But she knew that any show of feeling by her would only rouse the gayest suspicions in the breast of Countess Boccara. She must 'play up' to her frivolous friend. But how she longed to be natural at that moment!

'You think it is that!' said the Countess quickly.

'I do not think about it. I only suggest that it may be that.'

'I wonder if it is. Of course you knew about the Mancelli and Carelli—about their connection, I mean?'

'What does one not know by hearsay in Rome?'

'But you have seen them together out hunting?'

'Is that so very strange?'

'The rupture happened in the summer, very soon after you left Rome, *cara*.'

Suddenly Dolores remembered the curious change which had taken place within herself; the passing of indifference towards Carelli from her mind, the mysterious growth of uneasiness, of anxiety within her. This change had taken place very soon after she had left Rome for the summer. She had wondered what could have caused it. Had it could it have coincided with this definite, even drastic, change made by Carelli in his life?

The thought struck her almost like a missile.

'So many things must have happened after we left Rome,' she said, slightly raising her eyebrows. This was a little trick of hers, and it emphasised the wistfulness of her face. 'But look!' she added. 'Princess Bartoldi wants you.'

The pretty Sicilian Princess was forming her evening court. Countess Boccara was about to respond to her eloquent gesture of invitation with one equally eloquent, of regretful refusal, when she happened to perceive a tall Englishman, with yellow moustaches, and handsome grey eyes drawing near to the circle.

'Do you want to join the crowd, *cara*?' she said. 'Very well—for a little while.'

She beckoned to Montebruno and Carelli, who were standing a little way off looking about the room.

As she and Dolores went towards the Princess she whispered:

'Perhaps you are right, *cara*. Perhaps Carelli is going to marry. But who can it be?'

Dolores shrugged her shoulders.

But as she saw the strained eyes of Montebruno fixed upon her she shivered once more.

CHAPTER V

LADY SARAH IDES, who was uncertain in regard to plans as she was certain in regard to principles, remained, of course, unexpectedly, in Naples arranging for the future of her protégée until Saturday evening; but she telegraphed, in reply to a message from Dolores, to promise that she would be in Rome without fail for the blessing of the roof-tree on Sunday night. And she duly appeared at the Barberini Palace a few minutes before the Denzils, wearing a quite well-cut black gown, which she had somehow managed to put on all wrong. How so simple a gown could be wrongly put on, or in what exactly the wrongness consisted, perhaps even a mannequin could hardly have explained. But the least observant eye must have marked the fact, and marked also that the black aigrette, which Lady Sarah wore as a hair-ornament, had been unerringly inserted in the only place from which it could present a completely drunken appearance to the social world. In one hand Lady Sarah carried a small bag. This bag was merely a habit, like the blue gauze and the toques. Exactly what it contained, besides a pocket-handkerchief, few people knew. But every one who knew Lady Sarah was aware that it was generally overfilled with something. For it frequently burst open at unexpected moments, as if the closely packed contents were suffocating, and were determined at all cost to have air. And on these occasions a handkerchief always appeared on the summit struggling towards freedom.

When Lady Sarah was shown in Dolores was alone in the second drawing-room standing before the '*Donna guardando il mare*.' Italian servants seldom announced visitors. Lady Sarah had time to put her bag on a table, the bag had time to burst open, and Lady Sarah to close it with mechanical determination, before Dolores looked round.

'Lady Sarah!'

She came to greet her.

'Theo ought to be here. But he came in very late to dress. What a beautifully made gown! But . . . . .

With a pretty air of gentle intimacy she did something to it deftly, and added:

'I do love your hair. Will you let me put in your aigrette where they are worn in Paris now?'

'But, my dear child, what does it matter? Nobody looks at me.'

'Bend your head a little more. There! See what a difference!' She led Lady Sarah to a mirror. 'Now you are *chic*!'

No longer enveloped in veils Lady Sarah showed a charming head, covered with silky hair, in colour amber mingled with white. She wore it loosely arranged, and it made a characteristic frame for her blunt, but attractive features, and large, kind grey eyes. She was sixty, but did not suggest any special age, for sorrow had not robbed her of a very feminine buoyancy that was an essential part of her. And though she was sometimes vague, she generally moved in a very personal atmosphere of kindly animation, the animation which springs from the centre of the heart.

Now she put up her hand towards her head.

'No, no. You are not to touch it!'

Lady Sarah laughed. Then in her characteristic, veiled voice she said:

'I shall never be *chic*. I never was as a young woman.'

She sat down, with a carelessly supple movement, clasped her hands round one lifted knee and looked about the big room.

'You have done it delightfully—just the right red and green.'

Her eyes came to the hearth.

'That 's a delicious frieze. Those dear little boys are

illing with life. I can almost hear them shouting. But ere 's the wonderful doggie? Is he banished when you ve people?'

'I've got rid of him.'

'Already? What a short reign.'

'Theo didn't like him, couldn't bear him!'

Dolores sat down by Lady Sarah. With a sudden impetuosity she took her friend's hand, and said in a low voice nd hurriedly:

'This is our first real home since we've been married. do want Theo to like it. I want him to get to love it. So mustn't have anything in it he dishikes. And such little ings make all the difference. Nero just spoilt everything re for Theo. So he's gone and I won't have another dog. ady Sarah, you do like me, don't you?'

Lady Sarah impulsively clasped the hand that held hers ith both her hands.

'Then help me to make Theo's life happy here in Rome is winter. Help me to make him forget that his career 's an end, and he's out of harness. Do you know that this nner is to bless our roof-tree? Theo said so. Of course 's a phrase. But you—ask that it may be blessed!'

Abruptly she released her hand from Lady Sarah's.

'Theo!' she said, getting up. 'Lady Sarah 's been here n minutes.'

Her voice had completely changed. It sounded gently chaffing.

'Have you your hair, or—what a wonderful flower!'

Sir Theodore was coming towards the hearth. In his buttonhole he was wearing a small rose that was extraordinarily beautiful. It was no longer a bud, yet scarcely a full flower. Shyly it seemed to hover on the threshold of lovely life. In shape it was exquisite, and in colour it shaded from pale yellow to a deep orange hue, in which there seemed to be undernotes of reddish brown.

Dolores put up her hand as if she were going to touch it gently. Then, hesitating, she added:

'Where did you get it?'

Sir Theodore greeted Lady Sarah, turned towards his wife and answered, with a tender ring in his deep voice:

'*Little Theo gave it to me "to be grand with," to-night in honour of this important occasion.*'

Dolores let her hand drop.

'You know how delightfully fond children are of an occasion, Lady Sally,' Sir Theodore continued, standing by the hearth, and looking down at the little rose; 'how they leap at an event, whether it 's a Christmas stocking, or only Daisy or Dickie made new by the mumps! Little Theo Denzil leaped at this event, with a flower for his important godfather who has got a home and is giving a feast in it.'

And he touched the flower which Dolores had not touched.

'I wonder where the Denzils are,' said Dolores. 'Theo, I believe you have been there and made them late!'

She spoke lightly, smiling.

'I did look in to have a game with the children. They were in great spirits to-night.' He broke off as the door opened. 'Here come the father and mother!'

Mrs. Denzil came in rather quickly, followed by her husband, went up to Dolores and, putting her face near to the face of the person she was speaking to—a habit of hers which was rather engaging—begged her pardon for being late.

'I know it was Theo's fault,' said Dolores. 'He kept you by playing with the children.'

She turned and shook hands with Denzil, who was looking cordial in his stony way.

'Let us go in at once; and we will show you all the rooms afterwards, if you really care to see them. Edna, you and I must share your husband. We didn't ask another man. We wanted to be quite *en famille* to-night.'

'The way she said that won't be forgotten in heaven,' thought Lady Sarah, as she pushed her aigrette slightly out of its place and took Sir Theodore's arm.

Mrs. Denzil was a very happy woman, certainly one of the happiest women in the world, and simply and charmingly she showed it, diffusing about her an atmosphere of joy that had something of the radiant quality of light. She was not brilliant and never tried to sparkle in words. But her heart sparkled and drew people towards its rays. Denzil, too, was happy, and was too strong and sincere, too completely himself, ever to dream of concealing it. But neither did he ever obtrude his felicity. He and his wife were remarkably

natural people, and, being quite free from foolishness, never bored others with their blessedness, and very seldom roused others to active envy. To-night, being with genuine friends as they both supposed, they were in the mood for delightful hours, and the dinner began with spirit. Denzil was never a voluble man, but he had plenty in his mind, and, therefore, plenty to say to those who were congenial to him. Lady Sarah was very human and responsive. And Sir Theodore talked well and was full of life, even when he chanced to be sad. In depression he was never phlegmatic. The first part of the evening seemed to go gaily. The cook proved to be a success, and everybody admired the dining-room. And possibly as the evening began so it might have ended but for two reasons, each apparently trifling.

The first of these was the raising by Denzil of his glass in a toast to his friends' happiness in their new home. He did not of course make a speech, but at the end of dinner when dessert was brought round, he looked, or rather stared, about him with his strangely expressionless eyes, and, speaking in a slightly hoarse voice, said :

'Dolores—Theo, old boy—we wish you well here.'

There was nothing in the words. But Denzil spoke with such simple emphasis, and laid such an eloquent stress on the penultimate word, and the gesture with which he lifted his glass was so manly, and yet somehow so full of heart, that he struck into the hearts of his companions. Each one felt that here was a man who genuinely loved his friends, and with a strong nature was willing all good things towards them. Even the staring eyes and the slightly hoarse voice aided the impression he made.

'Thank you, Francis,' said Sir Theodore.

Dolores opened her lips, but closed them without speaking. Lady Sarah and Edna Denzil echoed Denzil's 'we wish you well' smiling, and drank the toast.

And then for the first time during that evening there was a pause, a silence which had in it something frigid. Sir Theodore looked across the table at Dolores. She was looking down. She was wearing a dress which was exactly the colour of cigarette smoke seen in bright sunshine. Her long, slight neck, her little dark head, her extraordinarily sensitive nostrils, the great curling lashes which showed against her

still girlish cheeks, at that moment seemed to her husband to stand out from their environment tragically. Often he had thought that his wife was wistful, was even mysterious looking. Now, for the first time, and only for a moment, he thought that there was something actually tragic in her beauty, tragic even in her softness. The impression he received was so painful that a wish, which was almost like a sword, that she would glance up cut through his mind. Instantly she did glance up, and met his eyes. And he found himself thinking: 'What is she? What am I? Oh, the curse—the curse of my ignorance, of the unceasing ignorance of us all!'

'Theo,' said Dolores, 'I'm going to sin against Roman etiquette. Stay and smoke with Francis, and we women will have a talk together. I have been so busy lately that I have seen nothing of Edna. Come in when you have had coffee, and finish your cigars with us.'

As she spoke she got up.

'Don't give Franzi one of your big cigars, please,' said Mrs. Denzil to Sir Theodore.

'Why not, Edna?' said Denzil, plaintively. 'You know they are the best cigars I ever get in Rome.'

'He smokes too much. It makes him hoarse. I should like my husband to be as melodious as yours, Dolores.'

'It isn't smoking. I have caught a cold, the Roman sunset cold. I insist on a big cigar on such an occasion.'

'Give it him then!' said Mrs. Denzil, smiling.

And she went out after Lady Sarah.

'Where is your new little dog, Dolores?' asked Mrs. Denzil, repeating Lady Sarah's question as the three women came into the drawing-room, 'I haven't seen him yet.'

'He was not a success. I've given him away.'

Mrs. Denzil looked sincerely surprised.

'Vi will be awfully disappointed,' she said.

She often used little bits of inoffensive slang in her English, which was spoken with a certain delicate precision that was slightly foreign.

'Will she? But why?'

'She heard there was a live dog from China here, and has been expecting to see a China dog, barking and walking. She will be quite crushed when she finds it is not to be seen.'

'Poor little Vi! Theo shouldn't have told her.'

'Oh, your husband can't keep anything from the children. They were longing to dine here to-night. He told them your roof-tree was to be blessed, and they imagined extraordinary ceremonies. Iris was describing them in bed to Marianna when we came away. She thought a roof-tree was a Christmas-tree growing among the chimneys, and that we were going to climb ladders after dinner for the blessing.'

'Let us look at the roof-tree,' said Lady Sarah. 'I love to be shown over houses. I want to see everything you have done, Dolores.'

'Very well. We won't wait for the others. Do you care for this room, Edna? Do you think we have made a success of it?'

Mrs. Denzil looked hastily round.

'It seems to me delightful. I don't believe it could be better.'

She continued to look about, then added naïvely:

'But my verdict is all bosh, of course. I have no feeling for decoration. Franzi says my taste is that of an Italian engineer. You know the modern Italian has a passion for machinery and no sense of art at all. The only thing that really furnishes a house for me is the people in it. I am not an artist. If I am anything, I suppose I am a humanist.'

Lady Sarah had moved away and was standing in front of the picture of the villa by the sea.

'What's that, Lady Sally?' asked Mrs. Denzil.

She went to stand by Lady Sarah, and put her face very near to the picture. Then she sighed.

'Why, what is the matter? What a gust!' said Lady Sarah, almost as if startled, and swaying round in her impulsive way to look at her companion.

'I couldn't live with that picture in my room.'

'Why not?' said Dolores.

'The loneliness of that poor thing would make me too sad. She is longing for a companion, and only that black storm is coming to her. It is one of the saddest pictures I ever saw. There ought to be no sadness in art, I think.'

'Then isn't art to reflect life?' said Lady Sarah.

She glanced at Dolores and regretted her question suddenly. Still gazing at the canvas Mrs. Denzil answered:

'I daresay I talk nonsense. I only mean that I don't like people deliberately to create sadness. I have been awfully fortunate. All my life I have been what children call as happy as a king—which means much happier than a king. And now I am perfectly contented. I hate to think how many poor things are sad, and I don't want their sadness to be increased by art.'

'Perhaps some of them need the sorrow in art,' Lady Sarah answered, in her veiled, rather pathetic voice. 'I go nearly every day to look at the "Pietà" in St. Peter's. Dolores, won't you show us the rooms?'

Dolores replied by a gesture, and led them on, showing them all that had been done, and listening to their comments. But when they reached the door of her and Sir Theodore's bedroom she hesitated. She felt an almost invincible reluctance to let the happy woman—the fruitful vine—cross its threshold. All the evening she had been secretly waging a combat, and now, abruptly, the enemy within her seemed to gain in strength and determination, to begin to get the upper hand.

'Our bedroom is in there, and Theo's dressing-room,' she said. 'But I'm sure you've seen enough, Edna. I feel I've been victimising you. You don't bother much about all these things—the trappings—I know. You—you have so much else to fill up your life with.'

'But I neglect the trappings far too much. I am a Philistine.'

She paused, then added:

'I really am very much interested in seeing everything. But perhaps you are sick of showing.'

'No! No!'

Dolores opened the bedroom door.

'I must examine this Madonna,' Lady Sarah exclaimed. 'Is it a very good copy of a Luini, or what?'

She was bending, and showed no intention of entering the bedroom.

'Theo thinks it a genuine Luini.'

The two women went into the bedroom together, leaving Lady Sarah in the boudoir which adjoined. Directly they had disappeared she ceased to be interested in the Luini. Nevertheless she did not follow them. She picked up a

book with a very beautiful Florentine binding, and sank into a great soft armchair. Murmuring voices came to her for a little, then ceased. Her friends had gone on into the further room. That evening she felt clairvoyante, and, because of her clairvoyance, melancholy. They had met to bless a roof-tree in Sir Theodore's phrase; they had wished well, and genuinely, not formally. But would their wishes, like the righteous man's prayer, avail? Lady Sarah had been smitten by terrible sorrows. She had lost an adored husband after only three years of marriage, and both her children, twin girls, one at the age of twelve, the other at the age of seventeen. These girls had been lovely in appearance and in character, as angelic as human beings can be, gay and loving, serene in their innocence, yet thrilling with the springtide of life. What they had been to their mother no one but herself could realise. What change their withdrawal behind the veil had wrought in her existence she had whispered sometimes to God, and to the Mother of many sorrows, but never yet to a living friend. She had been made, not marred, by her misery, and she often felt as if it had enormously increased her natural intelligence.

She felt so to-night, when the voices of Dolores and of Edna Denzil died away.

She was fond of Edna Denzil. Edna was very near to Lady Sarah's ideal of what a good woman should be. But for Dolores she had what might be called a *faiblesse*. Dolores fascinated her. And at any age a temperament like Lady Sarah's must be subject to fascination. As a delicate mist half-revealing, half-concealing, a landscape charms the eyes of a painter, Dolores charmed this middle-aged and highly sensitive woman. But sometimes she put fear into Lady Sarah's still glowing heart. To-night she did so.

When the voices sounded again in the distance, as the two women were returning, Lady Sarah got up, and went alone to the drawing-room of the sad picture.

She found the two men just coming into it from the dining-room, still smoking their cigars. They looked as if they had been having a good time together. Sir Theodore's face was full of animation. Denzil's was not. He seldom looked full of animation. But he had a robust air as of a

man in strong health, not in the least bucolic, clever, self-controlled, and stirred by the current of a serenely flowing happiness. He was a quiet man, not mercurial like his friend. Now, as he came in he was smiling and brought with him an atmosphere of genuine cordiality and contentment.

'All alone, Lady Sally?' he said.

He cleared his throat.

'Why have they deserted you?'

'They are just coming. I like wandering about beautiful rooms by myself. And Dolores is showing your wife everything. I can't help fastening on the special thing that appeals to me and giving it too much time. That is why I generally sight-see alone. Here they are!'

The door had opened, but instead of Dolores and Mrs. Denzil the *maestro di casa* appeared showing in Cesare Carelli.

For a moment Sir Theodore looked surprised, but he did not show surprise in his manner to this unexpected guest. He shook Carelli by the hand cordially and said:

'It's very good of you to come and see us in our new abode. Do you know Lady Sarah Ides?'

Carelli did not, and bowed to Lady Sarah.

'My friend Denzil you know.'

'Oh yes.'

'My wife will be here in a moment. She's showing Mrs. Denzil the rooms. Have a cigar.'

Carelli accepted one.

'I heard you were to be *in casa* to-night,' he remarked, 'and was very glad to know it, so that I might be one of the first to wish you a long and happy life in Rome.'

He spoke almost like a man wishing you a delightful visit to his own house, with a touch of proud proprietorship.

'Thank you,' said Sir Theodore. 'Of all cities that I have seen I feel most at home here. I always think of Rome as a glorious and beautiful village. But you must understand when I say that I mean because of its intimate charm, which no other town possesses.'

'I like to hear that,' said Carelli, as if a splendidly kind and sincere personality had been addressed to himself. 'A Roman likes to hear such sayings as that. There are some who come here and only see faults, that our roads are

neven, perhaps, or that we sometimes overload the mules. You are different. Thank you.'

His pride in his city was charming in its bold simplicity. Denzil stared at him fixedly, and said slowly:

'I mustn't dare to speak of the Via Nomentana, eh?'

By his intonation an observant person could have learnt that he liked Carelli. Most men did like him. He was certainly a popular man in Rome.

'That!' exclaimed Carelli, 'it is a quarry, one great bunker—to use a simile of Acqua Santa! It is a shame to Rome. Oh, we have much to do here yet. But we shall do it. Give us time. We are a young nation, remember, in our village.'

'If Rome were all quarry and bunker I should like to be driven off into it and left there,' exclaimed Lady Sarah.

Suddenly Carelli felt quite interested in '*la vecchia*.' He made a movement, as if to sit down beside her, when Edna Denzil came into the room with Dolores close behind.

Dolores was startled by the sight of Carelli. For a moment she forgot that it is a common practice in Rome to pay calls in the evening, and she thought that he had come for some special reason, to make some announcement, give some exceptional piece of news. A moment later she knew that her supposition had been quite absurd, and wondered how it could have come into her mind. She had just passed through a few minutes of mental misery such as only women can understand and suffer. While she had been showing Edna Denzil her beautiful bedroom and the room beyond it, quietly discussing their arrangement, drawing attention to the green damask bed coverings, to the curtains which had come from a palace in Siena, to a wonderful crucifix of ivory and lapis lazuli, which Sir Theodore had bought from a rascally Greek priest in Jerusalem who had had no business to possess it, she had been looking at her life, and had seen it like a thing that stands out terribly, more than distinctly, with unnatural fierceness, and then shrivels in a fire. The words she uttered had seemed to sear her lips with their bitter nullity. She believed that she had shown nothing of her pain to Edna Denzil, and the effort to conceal had made her feel almost hysterical. For a moment the unexpected sight of Carelli threw her off her guard, and conquered in her

the long habit of outward self-control acquired by contact with the world. She stopped for an instant, and her expressive face was marked by a look of almost alarmed inquiry. Then she came forward and greeted Carelli with her usual ease of manner, while Denzil began talking to Lady Sarah, and Sir Theodore and Mrs. Denzil sat down on a sofa at a little distance.

Carelli had seen Dolores' astonishment and for the first time wondered whether the Cannyngs had meant to receive that evening. But the Denzils were here, and '*la vecchia*.' Surely it was all right? Still he felt slightly doubtful, and almost immediately he said to Dolores:

'I was told you were *in casa* to-night. Was it true?

Dolores smiled.

'But you can see for yourself! We are here, with friends.'

'But, forgive me, perhaps they have dined with you?'

'Yes.'

'Were you expecting people to drop in after dinner to-night?'

'But why do you ask?'

'I see. You were not.'

He did not look troubled or ill at ease, but he added:

'I really ought to go. I had no idea.'

'Theodore and I are delighted to welcome you.'

'But I must explain my mistake.'

He leaned forward, crossing one leg over the other, and resting one arm on his knee.

'Countess Boccara told me to-day that you were at home this evening and that she meant to drop in. She even gave me a rendezvous here.'

'She probably mistook something I said. No doubt she will turn up presently.'

But the little Countess never came, and Dolores did not really expect her.

A sense of relief had come to Dolores. She had been seized almost with fear at the unexpected sight of Carelli. The explanation he had just given showed her how absurd she had been, what an unreasonable mental condition she had allowed herself to fall into. And in relief she felt unusually cordial.

'I hope we shall see you here very often. Large rooms

like these are made for entertaining, and we mean to receive a good deal.'

She went on quickly to develop to Carelli a scheme for creating a salon in Rome. For since she had shown Edna Denzil the rooms her floating and vague thoughts of making Theo's life interesting had concentrated themselves, formed themselves into that. Carelli listened with his black eyes fixed upon her. Italians often stare without any intention of being rude. Dolores spoke of clever and intellectual men, of archæologists, writers, painters, musicians, even of actors.

'You are going to have them here at parties?' said Carelli.

'I wish to.'

'With the Boccaras, the Monteverdis, Princess Merula, the diplomatic set?'

'Why not?'

She spoke almost defiantly. Had not Edna Denzil said that evening that only people furnished rooms? Suddenly, divining opposition, Dolores felt as if she cared for her scheme, as if it were something of great moment in her life.

'That may be all very well in London, but it would never do here in our Rome,' said Carelli with conviction.

'How can you tell?'

'It has been tried. An ambassadress tried it.'

He mentioned a name once very well known in Rome.

'Mamma has often described to me what a terrible failure it was. At first the archæologists, writers, musicians—actors there were none—were very pleased, and the princesses were very much surprised and rather frightened. Some of them even came in high dresses! Then the archæologists and company tried to be frivolous and the princesses to be profound. This—mamma said—made the archæologists quite hysterical, and the princesses became bored. Finally the archæologists were red and angry, and the princesses—well, simply there were none, not even in high dresses! So it ended! And the ambassadress took to charity—and parrots.'

'I shall never take to parrots!'

'Then you will take to hunting again, and that will be ever so much better.'

He glanced across the room to the sofa where Sir Theodore

was sitting with Mrs. Denzil. At that moment both of them were looking very animated Mrs. Denzil was telling Sir Theodore an escapade of her children. He was listening and sometimes breaking in. And he had that unmistakable expression of a man whose attention is completely grasped by the matter in hand. Carelli believed that Sir Theodore was in love with Mrs. Denzil, and was probably, indeed almost certainly, her lover. This was a perfectly natural conclusion for an Italian to draw from Sir Theodore's great intimacy with the Denzils and incessant visits to their house. It did not arise because Carelli's mind was nasty but merely because it was Italian. Why should a married man go perpetually to a flat inhabited by a still young and charming woman if he is not in love with her? It would be waste of time. Denzil's attitude did not trouble Carelli. He did not bother about it. He knew how strangely blind or accommodating Roman husbands sometimes were, and he had paid occasional visits to London, and stayed in English country houses during the shooting season. There were husbands—and husbands, in England as well as in Italy.

Now his eyes turned from the couple on the sofa to the face of Dolores, and she read his thought in his eyes.

He did not understand the truth at all. Her confidence in her intuition was in no wise affected by his misreading of the situation—a misreading so characteristic of a man. But she longed to put him right. And the strength of her longing startled her. Why should she care what Carelli thought? The sense of anxiety, almost of fear, which had assailed her so mysteriously in the summer came upon her again. An influence touched her, like a finger laid upon her in the dark. And something within her recoiled. And something within her waited, motionless.

'I am not going to hunt. I am tired of hunting. If I cannot have a salon, at least I can get to know interesting people and have them here. They must come also if the uninteresting people are afraid to meet them. But, in spite of the ambassadress, I mean to try to mix them.'

Out of her uneasiness she spoke almost with crossness.

'And you will ask me?' said Carelli.

'You! Why not? I shall invite nearly every one I know. These rooms are large.'

'And we are to furnish them for you?'

His quiet voice, in which there seemed to be a smile, made Dolores realise that her nerves were playing serious tricks with her to-night, and that she must not give way to them. She knew she had been almost impolite. It was that thought of Carelli's, that stupid belief of his about the two people on the sofa opposite, which had driven her into irritation. But now that she recognised that fact she would not be betrayed by it again.

'My friend, Mrs. Denzil, says it is only people who furnish rooms,' she remarked.

And she tried to throw cordiality into her voice as she said the word 'friend.'

Carelli stared at Edna Denzil, who, yielding to her habit, was putting her face near to Sir Theodore's while she talked to him. He had little doubt that Sir Theodore had imposed Mrs. Denzil's company on his hostess that night, and he considered that Sir Theodore was quite within his rights in doing so. And Lady Cannynge was trying to carry the matter off with a high hand and to throw dust in his eyes. How could she feel that Mrs. Denzil was her friend? But she had to make the best of things, as so many wives have to in Rome and elsewhere. Despite his strong feeling for Dolores he did not pity her very much because of the fate he supposed to be hers. The Roman tradition was against such pity, especially such pity in a man. And Carelli was really Roman at heart, not English. He was confronted, as he believed, by the very ordinary situation of an unfaithful husband bringing the other woman to his wife's house. If she was a woman of society, not discarded by her husband, that was nothing out of the way. It was done every day, not only in Rome but in many other cities. But though Carelli did not specially pity Dolores he was beginning to love her, more than he had ever yet loved. And that fact made the supposed situation of very vital consequence to him.

'Interesting people?' he said, looking from Mrs. Denzil to Sir Theodore.

'People one likes, whether they are interesting or not, I suppose.'

'Could you like some one who was uninteresting?'

'Why not? I don't think one's heart is always, or perhaps even generally, led by one's brain.'

'It is difficult for a man to know by what a woman's heart is led.'

'Besides,' said Dolores, ignoring this remark, 'the mere fact of your caring for some one makes him, or her, interesting to you. Everybody is interesting to somebody, but everybody is not interesting to a company.'

'To your salon!' he rejoined, smiling and showing his large even white teeth. 'Do tell me, when you open your salon, if I am permitted to come, in which set will you place me? Shall I be expected by you to be interesting or only interested?'

He leaned forward. Though he was still smiling, his large eyes looked almost seriously inquiring, as if he really wished to know. And as he asked his question Dolores asked a question of herself. Did she think Cesare Carelli an interesting man?

'You must be both,' she replied, also smiling; and still asking that question of herself. 'The linking of the two powers makes the perfect man, socially speaking.'

And then she drew Lady Sarah and Denzil into the conversation. Mrs. Denzil and Sir Theodore also came nearer and joined in. And for the last quarter of an hour before they separated the conversation was general.

Nevertheless it was not really gay. Nor did it flow quite easily. And the second reason why this evening of the blessing of the roof-tree was not quite a success was supplied by the unexpected presence of Carelli.

He infected Dolores with anxiety, and with something else, irritation, caused by his misreading of her situation which she divined. And what a hostess feels, her guests, if they are few, however faintly, however ignorantly, echo.

That festival of the blessing ended with two conversations. One was in the red and green drawing-room between Sir Theodore and Dolores, the other in the hired *coupé* in which the Denzils were returning home to the Via Venti Settembre.

When their guests were gone Sir Theodore stood by the fire and stretched himself a little, as tall men often do when they are relieved of some social burden.

'A pleasant evening—in patches, Doloretta,' he said.

'But, alas! only in patches. Was it Lady Sally, or was it some fault of mine, do you think? or was it Carelli coming in?' The Denzils I put out of this court of inquiry. I think probably they were unconscious that all was not going like a marriage bell.'

His wife lifted her eyebrows.

'You don't think it went off well?'

'Yes, but as I say—in patches. Now you and I ought to manage things better than that with our experience and *savoir faire*. Yet Lady Sally can't be responsible. She's a brick, and a charming and intelligent brick into the bargain.'

He pulled his pointed beard gently.

'I suppose it must have been Carelli. By the way, who on earth could have told him the lie that we were *in casa* to-night?'

'Rome is full of nonsensical rumours.'

'If he stuck to his supposition he must have thought our friends were somewhat reluctant in their coming.'

He moved his lips two or three times sideways, causing his beard to shift in a way that suggested an alert restlessness and dissatisfaction.

'But who cares what he, or any one of those outside, thinks?'

'What do you mean by "those outside," Theo?'

'All the crowd of Carellis outside our hearts and our lives, Doloretta; those who are never coming in, the countless multitudes who will never matter. Let us go, you to your beauty sleep, I to a Russian novel, and forget our patchy evening.'

Dolores did not speak or move. She was looking into the fire.

'Doloretta!'

'Yes, yes!' she said, turning, 'let us forget our patchy evening.'

'And I will put this little rose into water. It is too lovely to be allowed to fade before its time.'

He drew little Theo's gift carefully out of his coat.

Meanwhile the Denzil's *coupé* was slowly mounting the hill to the Via Venti Settembre. It was a narrow *coupé*, and, as they sat in it, they touched each other.

'They 're very cosily settled, old Theo and Dolores, aren't they, Ed?' said Denzil.

He cleared his throat.

'The cigar doesn't seem to have done my cold much good. I believe you were right.'

'You really do smoke rather too much, Franzi.'

Denzil took hold of his wife's hand, as if he were taking hold of his own.

'I 'll knock off one or two a day.'

'I believe you ought to. Yes, they are cosily settled, and it 's a lovely apartment. But I don't want to be in it.'

'No more do I. And yet it would really suit us better than it suits them, because we are five to their two. Poor old Theo! It is hard on him never having had a child. I don't know that Dolores minds.'

'If she did she would never say so.'

'She 's so fond of all sorts of things—dogs and horses, art, music, furniture, I doubt if she 's one of the women who need children.'

Mrs. Denzil thought she knew better, but she did not think it necessary to say so. And she had something else that she wanted to say to her other half, who held her hand as if it were his own.

'Franzi, do you think Dolores really likes me?'

'Likes you! Of course she does. Why, what greater friends have we in the world than Theo and Dolores? I was Theo's best man.'

'Yes, but I wasn't. And Sir Theodore isn't Dolores.'

'What can possibly have put it into your head that Dolores dislikes you?'

'I didn't say that. I don't believe I am the sort of woman to rouse active personal dislike in a woman so naturally sweet-natured as Dolores. But to-night——'

'Well, what was it?'

'Dolores was showing me over the apartment. When we came to her bedroom, which is really quite lovely, a show bedroom, the sort you and I could never endure, I don't believe she wished to let me into it. I know she didn't.'

'Did you go into it?'

'Yes.'

'Well then?'

'I didn't wish to show that I thought she wanted to keep me out. And she didn't wish to show that was what she wanted.'

'Merciful heavens! What subtleties! What hedging!'

'That is how women are, Franzi. So she asked me to go in and I went in.'

'And then what happened, you number one absurdity?'

'She showed me everything. But how she hated my being there!'

'Wasn't Lady Sally there too?'

'No, she was looking at a picture outside. You know, Franzi, there are some women who hate to sleep in a room with another woman, however intimate a friend she may be. When she was showing me the bedroom Dolores was feeling like one of those women—if she had to.'

Denzil said nothing for a minute. He was accepting his wife's intuition slowly. His mind was transmuting that fragile thing, a woman's guess, into what was to stand to him as a solid fact.

'I can't imagine any one disliking you, Ed,' he said at length. 'You never interfere with other women, do you? You like them, which many of your sex don't, according to their own account. You never go for a man, because I never let you have the chance'—a hand squeezed his—'and therefore women who are robbers feel safe with you. Besides, Dolores is a sweet and gentle creature, isn't she? I always thought so. After you I look upon her as one of the best women I know.'

'Say before me, and you wouldn't be out of the course.'

'Take care—slang!'

'That isn't slang. But all that has nothing to do with it.'

'Hasn't it, mystifier?'

'Franzi, great happiness creates envy, and sometimes in very sweet women. I begin to think that our happiness is hurting Dolores.'

'I can't see that.'

'No, you old dear. But only I know how short-sighted you are, and that 's why you stare with those two eyes like two stones, and frighten people.'

'And even if you are right we can do nothing. We can't help being happy!'

'No, no! *Grazie—grazie a Dio,* we can't help being happy!'

They had reached the top of the hill. The rushing of water in the fountain sounded in their ears. The spray almost touched their cheeks through the open window of the carriage. And the horses trotted, as if in a hurry to reach the only earthly Paradise—a happy home.

CHAPTER VI

A FORTNIGHT before Christmas Marchesa Verosti began her 'Thursdays'; that is to say she was at home in the Palazzo Antei from five to seven every Thursday afternoon. The Marchesa was old but full of vitality, and still eagerly interested in all that was going on in the world. Her three daughters were all married. Her only son had found a fortune with a pretty wife attached to it in America. And her jovial husband, who was a senator, a sportsman, and a viveur, at the age of seventy was still healthy enough to revel in the follies of life.

Rome is full of the faithful, and Marchese Verosti still commanded a large following of adherents, drawn chiefly from the Quirinal and cosmopolitan worlds. Her father had been a Roman, her mother an American from the South. From her childhood she had spoken English fluently, and some of the energy and swiftness of America, some of its freedom from the prejudices which still prevail in the old lands of Europe, mingled with her aristocratic Roman characteristics, and made her an excellent hostess. So her Thursdays were always well attended both by women and men, and those which fell before Christmas were crowded by people eager to describe the events of the *villeggiatura* and to hear the prospects for the winter.

On her first Thursday the Marchesa was assisted in receiving by two of her daughters, Countess Benfatae and Countess Elivei, small, graceful young women, with blue-black hair and likely dark eyes. They remained in the third

drawing-room, where tea was spread out on a huge round table. The Marchesa sat in the room beyond, in the midst of red damask, bibelots, and flowers.

Like her daughters she was small. Unlike them she was wizened, wrinkled, yellow, and shrunken. Her shrewd and inquisitive little face was flushed with paint, which only emphasised the colour of her natural complexion. Her eyes sparkled under tufted eyebrows, above which rose a high forehead, lightly dusted with powder, and surmounted by a festive-looking black wig, the curls of which were threaded by a scarlet riband of watered silk, with a fat hanging pearl attached to it exactly in the middle of her head.

In Rome people arrive punctually, and by a quarter past five the Marchesa's rooms were thronged. Most of the smartest and prettiest married women of the Quirinal set were there, many girls on the eve of entering the world, and plenty of men both middle-aged and young, among the latter numerous diplomats attached to the various embassies. Two ambassadors also looked in, and conversed amiably with the Marchesa, and seriously with three or four Italian politicians, who turned up for a short time, pretended to have tea, surveyed the debutantes critically, spoke in corners—no doubt on affairs of moment—and melted mysteriously away.

The general company discussed affairs important rather to individuals, or to sections of fashionable humanity in Rome, than to the country or the world at large. And three topics seemed to be uppermost in minds and on lips; a rupture, a new hostess and what she was likely to do in the way of entertaining during the coming season, and the immense losses of a gambler. The rupture took first place in the conversations of the smart married women. The girls were able to join in when the new hostess was on the tapis. And there was scarcely a man present who was not thoroughly interested in the losses of the gambler. 'The Mancelli' and Cesare Carelli were the heroine and hero of the rupture; Dolores was the new hostess; and the unfortunate gambler was Marchese Montebruno.

Rome was genuinely disturbed about Princess Mancelli. In Italy husbands are very faithless, but lovers are very faithful. Many a liaison becomes consecrated by usage in

the eyes of a world that is not greatly troubled by questions of strict morality, but which has a decided feeling for romance, and a strong sense of the obligations of lovers. Such a liaison had been that existing between Princess Mancelli and Cesare Carelli. Yet the Princess was now forty-three and Carelli only just thirty, and when the affair had begun Carelli had been a boy of but eighteen.

In those early days, twelve years before, the Princess had been severely blamed, and, for a short time, had been in danger of losing her social prestige. People said, and thought, it was a shame to break up the life of a boy and impair his freedom. Many mothers were indignant on behalf of their budding daughters; and Cesare's parents were furious, and made efforts to detach their son from a woman they chose to call 'old.' Of course the Prince was an abominable husband. Every one knew that. He was forever in Paris living an 'impossible' life. From the first he had treated his wife atrociously, and after remaining with her for a couple of years had practically deserted her. Nevertheless she had done very wrong in spoiling the boy's life, and in keeping one of the best *partis* in Rome from matrimony.

Why did Rome forgive her? Because she had great force of will, was a *grande dame*, an accomplished *mondaine*, was connected with several of the very greatest families of Italy, and knew how to be determined with discretion. And she genuinely adored Carelli, and never looked at any one else. Rome loves romance. And, the longer it lasts the more Rome loves it. So, as time passed on, Rome not only forgave Princess Mancelli for her lapse from virtue, but actually came to think of the lapse itself as a sort of virtue—on the left hand; something that must be expected to continue indefinitely, and that must not be interfered with.

The Princess and Carelli did not advertise their connection unduly. The proprieties were scrupulously observed. But Carelli generally happened to be where the Princess was. Whenever she had a party he dropped in. In the hunting-field it was an understood thing that he was her lead. He was her partner in every cotillon. And in the summer when she was in Paris, in London, in Aix, at St. Moritz, Cadenabbia, or Varese, so was he, though not always in the same hotel.

But during the summer just over the Princess had gone to Switzerland alone, and Carelli had remained in Italy with his family.

Rome was distressed at such a change in the established order of things. It could only mean a rupture. Who was the woman?

Names were whispered. But nobody really knew. The Marchesa Verosti was among the most anxious to arrive at the truth. Age had not withered her interest in the affairs of her neighbours, and she eagerly sought among her many guests for somebody who could inform her.

'There is the little Boccara! She may be able to tell us!' she suddenly exclaimed, as she perceived the Countess, in a very tight black velvet dress, with an immense plumed hat, coming with tiny steps into the tea-room, and giving her left hand, in a white kid glove, to man after man to be kissed.

'How extraordinary her waist is!' said Mrs. Melville Pringle, a large woman, half American, half English, who was sitting with the Marchesa. 'I remember her in Paris when she was sixteen, and she was one of the fattest and awkwardest girls I ever saw. We always called her the Lyons dumpling.'

'Madeleine!' cried the Marchesa, beckoning and nodding till the fat pearl quivered in front of her wig.

In the distance the Countess blew a kiss to her hostess, made a piteous face, and held up a tea-cup.

'Tea and lemon to make her more slender!' said the Marchesa.

'What I can't understand is how all that starving doesn't affect her face,' said Mrs. Melville Pringle. 'I tried it, and got such a dragged look that I had to give it up and eat like other people.'

'You and I needn't bother, my dear,' said the Marchesa comfortably. 'We are long past all that! Madeleine! Come and sit down. How nice to see you again after all these months. You know Mrs. Melville Pringle?'

The Countess nodded to that lady with an indifference that bordered on insolence, and sat down on a straight chair. Never yet had she been seen to sit in an armchair, or to lie down on a sofa.

'You've been in Switzerland this summer, haven't you?' continued the Marchesa, earnestly.

'I was at Lucerne before I went to Aix.'

'Lucerne! Did you see the Manelli! I heard she was there.'

'Lisetta—oh yes, she was at the National.'

The Countess spoke carelessly, and glanced about the big room to see how many men were looking at her.

'Was she alone?'

'She arrived alone and joined the Duke and Duchess de Vaudoise, and some others, all French, I believe.'

'I know the Duke and Duchess de Vaudoise,' observed Mrs. Melville Pringle, weightily.

'*Pourquoi pas?*' asked the Countess, with impertinence. Mrs. Melville Pringle bored her, and to those who bored her she was merciless. When she could not cut them she crushed them.

'Come here, Principe,' she now called to an aristocratic looking, middle-aged man, who was moving cautiously forward not far off. And she turned her shoulder to Mrs. Melville Pringle who got up with a lowering glance.

'We always called her the Lyons dumpling in Paris, always. She was so *huge*,' Mrs. Melville Pringle murmured acridly to the Marchesa.

Then she moved haughtily towards the tea-room.

'That woman 's the greatest bore in Rome,' exclaimed the Countess as Prince Perreto came up and kissed her hand. 'I never discuss things before her. She repeats them to the wrong people to make an effect and raises one up hosts of enemies. What 's all this about Montebruno?'

'He has lost everything,' said the Prince, sitting down with a sunny smile.

'Ah, Carlo!' cooed the Countess, 'Carlo, *buona sera*!'

A handsome young man with tiny black moustaches obeyed the coo, and sat down on her other side.

'Well, but that 's nothing new,' continued the Countess, 'Montebruno had lost everything before I came to Rome. Besides he never had anything.'

'He had all Teresa's dot,' observed the Marchesa.

'Two million lire,' said Perreto.

The young man's expressive eyes which till now had been soft and melting, suddenly looked hard and greedy.

'That's nothing if one plays. I don't suppose it lasted Montebruno two seasons,' said the Countess.

'Not nearly so long,' observed the Prince, pressing his hands together, then suddenly separating them.

The young man, Carlo Vitali, looked respectful. Montebruno was greatly admired and looked up to by the aristocratic youth of Rome on account of his notorious vice.

'Did he really lose two millions?' asked Vitali, in a soft tenor voice, as who should say—'What a man!'

'Before they 'd been married a year,' said the Prince, cheerily.

'Teresa always told me it was a year and a half,' said the Marchesa, moving her tufted eyebrows up and down.

'Poveretta!' said the Prince negligently. 'That was to defend Montebruno. She loves him desperately to this day, and would never have been separated if it hadn't been for her mother.'

'The mother 's a horrid hard woman,' said the Countess. 'I can't bear her. She was always so down on Montebruno. So uncharitable! What 's Montebruno going to do?'

'Oh! he will manage,' said young Vitali, putting a monocle over his left eye, and gazing at the Countess from top to toe, then fixing his eyes on her waist. 'Montebruno is a great man. He can always find money.'

'They say it 's the Mancelli this time,' said the Prince, with a slight smirk and a side glance at the Marchesa.

'The Mancelli!' said the Marchesa.

'Who has helped him out.'

'But why should she?'

At this moment quite a stream of new arrivals claimed the attention of the unfortunate Marchesa, who was forced to bridle her curiosity, and to be amiable in frustration.

'Do you really believe it?' murmured the Countess.

'That 's what they say,' returned Perreto, with a lively air. 'It may be a *potin*.'

'It 's a very good one at any rate. Ah, my dear boy! Where on earth have you been hiding all this time? Why didn't you come to play bridge with us at the Teodoris yesterday? Come and sit down and explain yourself!'

She added the Englishman with the grey eyes, who had joined the circle around Princess Bartoldi after the little dinner at the Grand Hotel to her court. Till she had at least six men sitting round her she was miserable and felt abandoned by the world.

'I was at the Cannynges,' said the Englishman, a young attaché from the British Embassy, called Hereward Arnold.

With a couple of nods to the other men he took a chair exactly opposite to the Countess, at whom he gazed firmly.

'Ma che bella donna! Che donna simpatica!' exclaimed Prince Peyreto, throwing up his hands and making his voice luscious.

Hereward Arnold turned and regarded him steadily, without expression.

'Do you admire Dolores Cannynge?' the Countess asked him.

Although somewhat impassive, Hereward Arnold was no fool. He raised his shoulders.

'Does Lady Cannynge set up to be a beauty?' he said. 'I wasn't aware of it.'

'You don't admire her!' exclaimed the Countess. 'Well, I do. I think her the most beautiful person in Rome.'

'*Contessa mia!*' protested young Vitali. 'And you!'

He again looked at her waist and sighed gently. Then sitting nearer to her he murmured, with a sigh of hot and open sentimentality which made Arnold twist contemptuous lips:

'There is only one really beautiful person in Rome.'

'Then she is Lady Cannynge.'

She smiled into his handsome eyes.

'Yes, yes, she is! And Lady Cannynge is going to do great things this season. What was it like yesterday?' she added, turning towards Hereward Arnold. 'I meant to come but Leila Teodori made me play. So few of the women here play really well, and she had Count von Kreuz coming.'

'Yes, what was it like?' echoed the Marchesa, suddenly emerging from her duties as hostess. 'Extraordinary, I suppose, with this new idea of mixing people up like the presents one draws for in a Charity Tea.'

'Oh, it was all right,' said Arnold, remembering he was a diplomat. 'I couldn't stay very long.'

'Were there any archæologists?' chirped the Countess.

'I believe there was one. But he was in the tea-room all the time I was there, with Miss Hopetown.'

'They tell me the Ambassador is determined she shall be Venus in the tableaux at the German Embassy for the sufferers from the Rhine inundations,' said the Marchesa.

'The Hopetown girl!' cried out the Countess, turning sharply. 'But she is perfectly square. How can she wear draperies? And who ever heard of a dark Venus?'

'She certainly will not be the Mother of Harmonia,' murmured Prince Perreto to Arnold, with a fine smile.

'She is as square as my jewel-case,' said the Countess.

An animation of temper lit up her face, almost as if with a green light.

'She might do for Bellona—was it Bellona who had something to do with apple trees, in those times?'

She looked up at Vitali, who replied:

'Chi lo sa?'

'Or somebody of that kind, rustic and awkward. But as for Venus! Why even Dolores Cannynge would be better, though she looks almost like a Creole.'

'And so the Cannynge is to do great things this season,' said Prince Perreto, to change the conversation.

'What is she going to do?' said a languid Roman princess, with auburn hair, who came slowly up at that moment, and stood leaning on an *en tout cas* with a beautiful jade handle.

'Have all the clever people at her parties as well as us,' snapped the Countess decisively.

'Aren't we clever?' asked the Princess.

She looked vaguely at the floor, and moved the point of the *en tout cas* gently to and fro.

The little Countess, who had the Frenchwoman's contempt for slow wits, though she posed as a lovely little frivolity who had become thoroughly Italianised, made a grimace at Hereward Arnold.

'Not as archæologists and writers, Minetta,' she said sharply.

'No? But in *our* way!' murmured the Princess, still looking at the floor, and turning her fine profile towards the three men. 'Aren't we clever in *our* way?'

She glanced up at vacancy.

'There are so *many* ways,' she almost whispered.

And she moved slowly towards the tea-room, gazing before her, and holding her head slightly on one side.

'Since the Duca told Mimetta she looked like a Sphinx she has become a bore *numéro un*,' said the Countess pettishly.

'What Duca?' asked Arnold.

'My dear boy! when one says "*the* Duca" every one knows, or ought to know. Napoli Bella!'

Prince Perreto smiled and murmured something into the Countess's ear.

'I know,' she answered. 'I was at Naples at the time. It was very foolish of them both to manage so badly.'

She looked round her, and said to the company generally: 'One thing they can do in France. They can manage their affairs better than they are managed here.'

At that moment a very tall and clean-shaven man of about thirty, an Italian, came up, bowed over the Marchesa's hand, and said:

'Princess Mancelli is in the next room. She told me to say she was coming in to you, but Contessa Maria made her stop and have tea first. *Contessa bella!*'

He kissed Countess Boccara's hand with an air of profound adoration, which almost amounted to passion.

'The Mancelli!' exclaimed the Marchesa.

Again the fat pearl shook in the front of her wig, as if it had become tremulous in sympathy with her excitement.

Her tufted eyebrows sprang up and down.

'I think I'll go into the tea-room. I will have a cup of tea too.'

She got up, arranging the many rings on her rheumatic hands.

'How amusing if Carelli were to come!' she said, in a happily private but audible voice to the Countess.

'Oh, Cesare never goes to an afternoon,' said the little Boccara.

'He came to one of mine once, with her.'

The Marchesa walked into the tea-room.

'Sit down, Marcantonio,' said the Countess. 'Oh, Barone, are you back from Vienna? Come and tell us all about Kinsky's shoot.'

She smiled sweetly on a fair and bald young man, who hastened to join her court.

Secretly she was longing to accompany the Marchesa into the tea-room.

Every smart woman in Rome was at this moment keenly interested in Princess Mancelli, who had not as yet appeared in public since her return from the *villeggiatura*, and Countess Roccara was as curious as a soubrette. But she did not choose to show it just now. And she had five men sitting around her, and admiring that waist for which she lived.

Near the tea-table, sipping a cup of tea and nibbling a tiny cake covered with pink sugar, the Marchesa found Princess Mancelli, standing in a group of women.

Lisetta Mancelli, born Lisetta Torquemara, the child of Prince Torquemara and Anna, eldest daughter of Lord Ardran, an Irish peer, was a *grande amoureuse* and a finished woman of the world. She had within her depths of pride, but she seldom showed them, depths of passion which only Cesare Carelli had sounded, depths of the devouring and flame-like jealousy which is the shadow of such pride and such passion as hers. Before all things she was dominating. Every one felt her influence. When she came into any room, however crowded, she made people conscious that she, a personality, was there. Girls who aspired to success in the world made of her a fetish. She was their ideal *mondaine*, and they worshipped her from afar. For she would not be bothered with girls at close quarters. The married women of Rome for years had looked upon her as perhaps the leader in all things connected with the worldly life. As a woman of the world and a great lady she had a reputation that went beyond the borders of Italy. Men, both old and young, sporting and intellectual, *avides* and aspiring, were delighted, and even grateful, if she allowed them to be in her special set.

Nevertheless she had failed to hold her husband, and now it was whispered everywhere had been deserted by her lover.

Was there then some broken link in the chain of her influence, some secret weakness or failure in her character, which only those discovered whom she allowed to draw near to her real self, or whom she deliberately drew to her by a conscious exertion of the will? If there was, no sign of it was discoverable in her face.

The first impression of her was that she was full of subtleties, and that impression grew. She was not a beauty. She was an *élégante* with certain physical attractions for men; a perfect figure of the voluptuous type, not exceptionally tall, extraordinarily expressive and beautiful hands and wrists, a lovely skin, eyes not specially large but so bright and so fiery that they startled, sometimes troubled, those who for the first time suffered their gaze, clouds of dark hair that looked victoriously vital, like the hair of a Victory advancing in despite of all the opposition of the Heavens and the Winds. And she was more than perfectly self-possessed. There was something in her expression and manner quietly defiant of opinion, without hardness, as if her inner self knew so absolutely that it could not be changed, must remain for ever just what it was, that it was unable even to try to hide its knowledge from a world that asks wax from us on which it may set its crude and its various impressions.

Of this woman, at this moment, all Rome was beginning to whisper not triumphs but humiliation. Of course she knew it. No living woman knew her Rome better than did Lisetta Manelli. Long ago, by being her unyielding self she had nearly suffered the last condemnation of Rome. She had known what she risked when she seized on the youth and the fire of Cesare Carelli. But she had needed them and she had taken them. And she had lived to see the hands of Rome—her Rome!—almost piously raised as in blessing above her head and the head of her lover. Now she saw those hands wavering, as if, in surprised horror, Rome began to suspect there was no longer any one to bless.

And she looked very piercing and serene as she now faced Rome for the first time since the rumoured rupture.

It was characteristic of her that she allowed herself at such a moment to be surrounded not by men but by women. She was not a coward. If pain had to be, she was of the kind that goes to meet it. As yet she was ignorant who the woman was who had displaced her from the heart of her lover. She had been told by the one man, the only person to whom she had spoken of her catastrophe, who the woman was. She had been told that the woman was Dolores.

But she held herself ignorant. For in such matters she did not believe in the intuitions of men, and she had not convinced herself of the truth of what she had been told. On the contrary, she had some suspicion that what Cesare had done was probably a prelude to some project of marriage. His mother and father had perhaps at last persuaded him to seek a wife, and, unlike many Roman men, he had thought it honourable first to end what had been almost like a marriage, only much more passionate and romantic.

She stood among ruins, with the dust of their fall rising like a cloud about her, and sipped her tea in the midst of the group of women, which her hostess now eagerly joined.

Although to men Princess Manelli often seemed exquisitely feminine, to some women she showed a side of her character that, to them, seemed almost masculine, and that half-alarmed while it subjugated them. She was clever, and intellectual, and there were times when she intimated a contempt of gossip that resembled a man's. And in her nature there was also a love of sport not often found in Roman women. They sometimes appear to like a sport if it is fashionable. Princess Manelli liked sport for its own sake. She had been known to go duck-shooting in the Pontine marshes. And she was a hard rider to hounds.

As the Marchesa came up the Princess was talking of the sporting side of the winter season in Rome, and the Marchesa caught the word 'pity,' spoken with a touch of smiling contempt.

'What is a pity, Lisetta?' she asked, greeting the Princess with the warmth of an ardent curiosity.

The Princess looked round her to the group of women with her strangely piercing eyes.

'I was only saying it was a pity so few of the Roman women go out with the hounds. Without the Americans and the Austrians, and two or three English—such as Lady Cannynge—there would be no women at all who really follow, and who aren't afraid of the obstacles.'

'You are talking about hunting!' said the Marchesa, with obvious disappointment.

'Why not?'

The Princess put down her tea-cup.

Remember I have been away from Rome for a long time,

and have lost our habit of gossip. But I shall soon find it again no doubt.'

'You talk of the Englishwomen hunting in Rome,' observed Donna Alice Metardi, a very young American recently married to a Roman. 'And Lady Cannynge. Well, I can tell you Lady Cannynge 's just tired of it. She 's not buying any horses this season.'

'Isn't she?' said the Princess, with indifference. 'That is one woman the less in our little band then. But why is she giving it up?'

'She says it 's too expensive.'

'But her husband has come into any amount of money,' said the Marchesa. 'That is why he retired from the diplomatic service before he became an ambassador. She was furious about it. She wanted to be "Her Excellency."'

'Well, that 's what she says.'

'But what we want is never too expensive,' said the Princess negligently.

Donna Alice's new-England face expanded in a smile.

'That 's so!'

'Perhaps Lady Cannynge can't do the two things at once,' observed a pretty Dutchwoman who was sitting near the tea-table placidly and listening to the talk.

'What two things, Madame de Heder?' asked the Marchesa.

'Hunting and lion-hunting. Lady Cannynge is getting to know all the interesting people we never meet; the archæologists, the historians, the young painters, the musicians; that world we don't touch, except perhaps with the tips of our finger once or twice in a season—when we want to get something out of it. For *beneficenza* of course! *Ça va sans dire!*'

Calmly the Dutchwoman looked round her with her light and sincere eyes, in which there was a flicker of satire.

'Perhaps the cultivation of that world leaves Lady Cannynge no time for hunting,' she concluded rather drily.

'I hear the Cannynge's apartment is lovely,' said Princess Mancelli. 'No doubt she wants to show it to every one.'

'Well, but—to archæologists and historians!' exclaimed the Marchesa, who had a holy horror of antiquities, which

indeed were the only things that seemed thoroughly objectionable to her in her beloved Rome.

'Bettina, *cara*, I know a historian here in Rome who has more feeling for beauty, and more sense of romance, than all we women put together have,' said Princess Mancelli.

Suddenly her eyes became fiery, and her dark face filled with expression.

'We commit a great mistake in ignoring so much that makes our Rome grand and unique. I have always thought so,' she added. 'And so Lady Cannynge is going to give us Romans a lead, and not in the hunting-field!'

There was a sound of pride in her low voice as she said the last words.

Many Romans secretly resent the possessive manners and actions of the English and Americans who swarm in the streets of Rome, who own many of the finest houses and apartments, give the most elaborate parties, and permeate society, perhaps sometimes rather aggressively. Princess Mancelli was one of these Romans. As a rule she concealed the fact. For she knew her world, and knew what it was wise to conceal from it. To-day, suddenly a flame leapt up within her and shot out towards Dolores. For a moment Dolores bore the sins of a multitude of *forestieri* in the mind of this Roman lady, for a moment she deserved punishment for them all.

And yet not long ago Princess Mancelli had listened calmly, almost incredulously, to a statement of Montebruno's involving Dolores Cannynge. Despite her apparent serenity the mental atmosphere in which she found herself was having a cumulative effect upon her. She knew what all these women were thinking about as they stood around her. And though her complete self-possession dominated them, and to a casual spectator it would have seemed as if she was the ruling spirit among them, she felt all the time like one grasping rags in the frantic endeavour to cover her nakedness.

At this moment, unable to endure a longer suspension of her curiosity, although it was mitigated by five men, Countess Boccara stepped slowly into the tea-room followed by her train.

She and the Princess disliked each other, for woman's

reasons. The position of the Princess in Rome irritated the Countess, who wished to be not only the smartest, but also the most influential, woman in their small, but very complex and cosmopolitan, world. Unfortunately though she was an ultra-smart woman she was not a great lady. And whenever she was where Princess Mancelli was, somehow she was subtly made to feel it. In supreme elegance there is something mental which is lacking in supreme smartness. The Princess was supremely elegant, the Countess was only supremely smart. Behind her the Princess had the greatness of aristocratic Rome, and the solid traditions of aristocratic England. Whereas the Countess, behind her, had only the wealth and the business capacity of successful commercial France, her father having been an immensely rich Lyons silk merchant.

Therefore she disliked the Mancelli. And the Princess disliked her, for her pretensions, for her numerous small affectations, which grated upon the essentially unaffected, though exceedingly secretive, nature which is characteristic of the aristocratic Roman, and perhaps because of the great success of her smartness.

Nevertheless the two women were very intimate acquaintances, played bridge together, sat in the same box very often at the opera, and continually dined in each other's apartments.

Pourquoi?

'*Pourquoi pas?*' as the Countess would probably have said.

'Lisetta! This is our Rome indeed now you are back to lead us,' she dropped out languidly in Italian, as she came up. 'We other cosmopolitans, we can never really lead in Rome, even if we seem to. I always say that. We are too essentially modern. We have not within us that deep—silly people call it stagnant—seriousness which belongs to every true Roman.'

Her voice and manner were threaded with delicate malice, as the Marchesa's wig was threaded with the riband of watered silk.

Princess Mancelli looked quietly at the little Boccara.

'*Our* Rome!' she said.

Then she turned carelessly to Prince Perreto, and began

to speak to him about a new book on the eternal, but eternally interesting, subject of the *Risorgimento.*

But Countess Boccara had plenty of spirit—some called it impudence—and almost immediately she glided into their conversation, and with remarkable adroitness succeeded in leading it from Garibaldi and Cavour, from Caprera and Marsala, back to the modern Rome and United Italy which, with Paris, Monte Carlo, and two or three other places with Casinos, were all the world to her.

'You are hunting this season, of course, Lisetta?' she said, soon.

'But, of course!' said the Princess. 'When have I not hunted? Baron Gino has picked up two capital hunters for me, both of them Irish bred.'

'I shall look out for you at the meet on Thursday,' said the Countess. 'I am going to motor out with the Palacci.'

She paused, then, looking straight into the Princess's piercing eyes, she added:

'It will be your first day out this season, won't it?'

'Yes.'

'You are sure to enjoy it. The meet is at the *Divino Amore.*'

She dropped her eyes and turned to speak to Hereward Arnold. As she did so she saw Dolores in the distance, coming slowly towards the tea-room.

'There is that perfectly sweet Lady Cannynge!' said Donna Alice Metardi, who was a worshipper of Dolores.

An Englishwoman, who was just putting down a tea-cup, remarked:

'She has a very sweet face. But I must say lately I think she 's gone off. She 's beginning to look rather hard about the mouth.'

'Hard! Lady Cannynge! Oh no! She 's ever so sweet!' protested Donna Alice, almost as if personally attacked.

'Well, I think she 's getting to look hard,' returned the Englishwoman, an inflexible banker's wife called Mrs. Crawbridge, who was severely spending the winter in Rome.

Countess Boccara darted an almost cruelly searching glance at Dolores, who came up at this moment and began to greet her acquaintances.

She realised at once that Mrs. Crawbridge was right. There was a slight, but definite, change in the 'most beautiful person in Rome.' The wistfulness and the mystery were still in the eyes and on the lips. But there was also something fixed and cold in the small face, a numbness that vaguely altered it, as the touch of frost alters a landscape.

Dolores greeted the Marchesa and Countess Doccara, then turned to Princess Mancelli.

'I heard you had just come back to Rome,' she said. 'My husband and I have been here for ages. We arrived in October to see about our new apartment.'

'I hear it is quite lovely,' said the Princess.

She held the hand of Dolores for perhaps a brief instant longer than was usual.

'My husband thinks it is all right. And he is very difficult to please, in that way.'

'And in all the other ways?' asked the Princess, lightly.

A smile played about her lips, but her eyes looked unsmiling.

'The other ways?'

'Men are so exigent as a rule—aren't they?'

There was a hint of malice in the voice. Why she scarcely knew; it immediately roused in Dolores a defensive feeling that was fiery.

'Perhaps they are. But my husband isn't,' she said.

The Princess turned away to speak to an old Senator who was one of her devout admirers.

'That woman 's in love with her husband!' she thought.

CHAPTER VII

One afternoon, just before Christmas, Denzil came in from the Embassy after a busy day's work, and found his wife dressed to go out. The children were taking an airing in the Borghese gardens, but would doubtless very soon return home. For the hour of twilight was not far off, and they were always hungry at tea-time.

'Hullo, Ed! Where are you off to?' said Denzil, in a husky voice.

He came close to his wife, and, staring at her, he added:

'What a smart hat, you worldly creature!'

'I made it myself. Doesn't it look expensive? And how it would be despised if all the women I am going to meet this afternoon knew what it cost!'

'And how much was that?'

'Never mind, you old Franzi. Such knowledge is not for men.'

He lowered his rather bull-like head, she raised hers simultaneously, and a kiss was. One could hardly say they kissed, so natural, so unthought about, so inevitable seemed the meeting of their lips.

'Where are you going, Ed?' asked Denzil. 'Must you be off at once?'

'Do you want me?'

'I thought I would have a cigar, and that you might enjoy a half hour of ecstasy by sitting near me and watching me smoke it.'

'Franzi, how could that be ecstasy?'

'I didn't smoke even one yesterday, and I've had a lot of work. I feel as if I must. Besides, honestly, I don't believe the smoking has anything to do with my voice. Burton, the American naval fellow who's just come here, is twice as hoarse as I am, and he never smokes at all. It seems to be a sort of epidemic going about Rome, due to all this dust from the building operations.'

'Well, I don't want to be a brute. But let it be one of those teeny, light-coloured ones.'

'Right you are.'

Denzil took his wife by the arm, and they went down the broad passage to his study.

It was the cosiest room in the flat except the nursery, and at this moment it was, as Denzil sometimes said, 'flavoured with nursery,' for a small, but very finished gollywog belonging to Viola was seated in Denzil's special arm-chair, looking askance at the books and papers, and a Teddy bear lay on its back near the hearth with its head reposing on the last Literary Supplement of the *Times*.

Neither husband nor wife made any remark on these

tenants. Mrs. Denzil sat down on a worn sofa which was placed at right angles to the fireplace, and Denzil, after carefully cutting, lighting, and drawing at a small and pale cigar, went over to his chair, very gently moved the gollywog into one of its angles, and then took his seat beside her with a comfortable sigh of satisfaction.

'What a blessing a cigar is!' he said, crossing his feet. I don't know how I got through yesterday without one, Ed. Only my holy fear of you kept me straight. But to-day I must have sinned whatever your wrath.'

'Why to-day, Franzi?'

'Because I have been bothered a bit.'

He pulled happily at the little cigar, and watched the smoke go up in the room where the light was growing vague as the afternoon wore on towards the twilight.

'Has something gone off the rails?'

Mrs. Denzil leaned against the arm of the sofa, looking towards her husband. Her voice was very quiet and even. But she felt sure Franzi had been making a *gaffe*.

'Oh, it's nothing of importance. Only it seems I've put a silly woman out.'

'Of course!' said Mrs. Denzil's mind, while her voice said, 'Have you?'

'You know when we had that Embassy dinner for the Prince and Princess'—he mentioned the names of two English royalties—'and there was all that row about the Tomtit being sent in by mistake with a mere Mrs.'

The Tomtit was the ambassador who represented one of the great powers in Rome.

'Of course I do. But it is all right. The Tomtit himself was laughing about it with me only yesterday at the Wolkonskys.'

'Yes, the Tomtit 's got over it. But that isn't the point.'

Mrs. Denzil quietly lit a cigarette. What had the dear old blunderer been up to now? It was she who had made the ambassador laugh. But now there were other consequences of the affair to be dealt with.

'No?' she said, dropping the match.

'It is the mere Mrs. who is up in arms.

'Mrs. Slingsby?'

'Yes. I didn't know it was she who had been palmed off

on the ambassador—at least I had utterly forgotten if I ever did know—and so I told her the whole story at the Bulgarian minister's lunch.'

'Franzi!'

'I know. I told her the Tomtit had said it was an affront to his emperor his being sent in at an official dinner in honour of English royalties with a nobody, and being expected to walk in behind one of his own secretaries.'

'You said that to Mrs. Slingsby!'

'Well, Ed, I was treating her as a real pal, and I hadn't the faintest idea——'

'Dear old boy, when do you have—in such matters?'

'It seems she's cut up awfully rough about the whole business, and been complaining about it to Lady Gervase. This sort of thing is the nuisance of diplomacy, Ed. All this social rubbish, all this everlasting fuss about precedence, is unworthy of any one with a genuine mind. And yet one has to bother about it because people are so tiresome and petty.'

'And so Mrs. Slingsby 's been complaining!'

'Yes.'

'What did she say?'

'Heaven knows. But the ambassador spoke about it to me. He was rather put out about something. There have been two or three other little mistakes lately, it seems. They are as particular about etiquette here as they are in Vienna. If old Theo had got Vienna he 'd have had a terrible time.'

Mrs. Denzil knew that Sir Theodore was quite incapable of making such social mistakes as those committed by her husband. But she did not say so. She was thinking busily.

'I shall probably meet Kitty Slingsby this afternoon,' she said presently.

'Where?'

'At the Cannyngs.'

'Is that where you are going in the hat?'

'Yes. Why don't you come too?'

'No, Ed, not even Dolores and Theo could tempt me to show up in the afternoon. Do you know I begin to pity Theo.'

'Why?'

Always people in the house. A man can't like it. 'A man wants his home to be his own. He likes to have some privacy in it, some peace.'

As he spoke he glanced about the room, then at his wife, and heaved a slight sigh of satisfaction at the calm of their interior.

'Dolores is getting together some very interesting people, I believe,' observed Mrs. Denzil mildly.

'I dare say she is. But it 's everlasting; especially in the afternoon when every man likes to be free.'

'Theodore isn't obliged to be always there, I suppose.'

'Of course not. But there always seems to be some special interesting bore he must meet *coûte que coûte*. Oh, Ed, how delightful it is to put one's feet in one's fender, and to know that not a single interesting person will get inside one's door for a good twenty-four hours at the very least!'

She laughed happily.

'You and I were born to be fogies, Franzi.'

'Thank God for it.'

'Let 's try to be diplomatic fogies, eh? Shall we?'

'Wasp! Would you plant a sting in your faithful husband?'

He touched her hand.

'But seriously Ed, I can't think what's come to Dolores lately. She used to be so simple and natural. And now she seems to be perpetually straining to be something she isn't, aiming at wits superficial brilliance, and all the rubbish the real women—women like you—never bother about. Surely you must have noticed it.'

'She wants to make Theodore's life interesting and amusing.'

'Theo's!'

'Now that he has nothing special to do.'

'You think she does it all for Theo?'

'I expect so.'

'Then she forgets, or doesn't know, that at bottom old Theo 's just a primitive man with a longing for the primitive things. He 's got more world-varnish than I have, but he 's no more worldly, in the accepted sense of the term, than I am. What he really likes is just to drop in here and smoke a cigar with me, talk over things quietly, and have a good

romp with the children. He 'd do it every day if Dolores didn't cram their rooms with the intellectual salt of the earth. But as it is he comes much seldomer than he used to. Haven't you noticed it ?

'Now they 're settling down, perhaps they 're getting to twig —

'Slang !

'They may be getting to know people more intimately.'

'Whom have they got to-day ?'

'I don't know. But there 's to be music, I believe. Franzi !'

'Well ?'

'I suppose there really is a good chance of your getting Munich eventually, after what Sir Allan told you in London.'

'Remember it 's a dead secret ! Even old Theo knows nothing. Yes, there should be a good chance.'

As he spoke Denzil's rather impressive face showed a certain brightness, almost an eagerness.

'Let 's be careful not to spoil it.'

'Now, what are you up to, Ed ?'

'Well, Kitty Slingsby 's a great pal —'

'Pal !'

'Friend—friend of Sir Allan's. And she 's a cousin of the minister.'

'For Foreign Affairs ! By Jove, so she is ! I 'd forgotten all about that.'

'The more you remember the more likely you are to get Munich, I guess.'

She made the remark seem light and casual by the little Americanism with which she closed it. She got up from the sofa.

'I must go. Have you any message for Kitty Slingsby ?'

'Say I am overwhelmed with contrition, Ed. The truth is all these silly outside things, the social things that mean nothing really, never hold me for a moment. The genuine business of diplomacy, foreign affairs, the intricate relations between our country and the rest of the nations, the undercurrents of political opinion and political intrigue—that 's a man's business, that and anything to do with his home. But '—suddenly he pulled up with a laugh—'no, I won't defend myself. The fact is I 'm too English, right through

all the grain. And there is a touch of the barbarian in every true and thorough Anglo-Saxon, I suppose.'

He took hold of his wife's hand and drew her down towards him.

'Be Latin for me, as you know how to be, Ed, with Mrs. Slingsby to-day,' he said, with a very unusual flash of perception of his wife's part in his diplomatic career.

She put her face against his for an instant, looked in a glass, settled the wonderful hat with a light and intelligent touch, and went out of the room smiling.

She loved to be at work for Franzi. But she feared Kitty Slingsby would be more difficult to deal with than the ambassador whose nickname was 'Tomtit.'

Left alone Denzil lay back in his great arm-chair. The window was open behind him, but there was a small fire, and the room was pleasantly warm. The little cigar was not yet smoked out. He husbanded it with a cherishing care. As the evening drew on the light from the flames grew in value and beauty, made him think for an instant of winter evenings in England. At any moment he might hear the voice of the returning children, hear their feet running down the passage, their small hands feeling at the handle of the door. He forgot all about Mrs. Slingsby and his maladroitness. The good of life took hold upon him, the sane beauty and glory of God's great gift. Easily, too easily perhaps, he had accepted all his happiness, treating it as men treat the air, breathing it in and seldom or never thinking about it. Now, for a little while, he looked back, and then, being still young—is not a man with a career still young at forty?—he looked forward. And in the foreground of both prospects there was happiness. Indeed the future glowed with an even clearer radiance than the past. For if he was promoted to Munich, as seemed probable, in no very long time he would be a minister, and his own master under Government. And from minister some day he would no doubt take the great step to the rank of ambassador. His thought switched off that track and went to his friend, Theodore. Always Denzil had regretted his friend's retirement, but never so much as this evening, when his own prospect widened and his own life seemed very good. Poor old Theo! What a mistake he had made in retiring! Such a clever diplomat to be so im-

pulsive in a personal matter! It was all over for him, and it was all beginning for Francis Denzil! In his happiness Denzil found room for sympathy with his friend. Indeed, at that moment he felt, as many another good man has felt, as if his happiness were a strong light by means of which he saw clearly into the heart of another. Denzil's affections were not very widely distributed. They were concentrated and very strong. He loved Sir Theodore with a certain fine reserve, with a certain close-fibred strength. And as he sat by the fire resting, and finishing his cigar, he wished with a very unusual vehemence that 'old Theo' had not his luck, he would not have parted with that for anything, but as much luck as he had.

He heard a step in the passage, a knock at his door.

'*Avanti!*' he said huskily.

He cleared his throat.

The door opened and Sir Theodore came in.

'Theo! I was just thinking about you, but as to expecting you to-day—well!'

He held out his hand without getting up. Sir Theodore grasped it, turned and shut the door.

'Are the children still out?' he asked, coming up to the fire.

'Yes. They're unusually late to-day. So you've fled! You couldn't stand any more of it?'

Sir Theodore looked down at his friend with a hint of surprise in eyes and bearing.

'Fled—from what?'

'The Barberini music combined with hats. Ed has just gone to listen to the former and add a remarkable monster to the latter.'

'I'd forgotten all about it.'

Sir Theodore looked almost startled, and then decidedly vexed.

'What a bore!' he added.

He took out his watch and glanced at it.

'I ought to go at once.'

He kept the watch in his hand for a moment. Denzil stared up at him. Denzil had just finished the cigar, and now, reluctantly, let the end of it fall into the fender. He longed to light another, and to see his friend sit down in the

big chair near his and light up too. But he did not say so. He only stared with his short-sighted eyes.

Sir Theodore put the watch back slowly into his pocket.

'The music is going to be good,' Franzi, he said, moving his chin so that his pointed beard shifted sideways. 'And you 've finished your cigar.'

'*Ehu!*'

There was a pause. Then Denzil said:

'Very much regrets that a previous engagement!'

'What previous engagement?'

'A domestic one, Theo. I 've seen nothing of the brats to-day.'

'But they 're not in.'

'They will be directly.'

'Directly your door shuts behind me, no doubt,' said Sir Theodore.

His deep bass voice sounded almost harsh for an instant.

Still Denzil did not ask him to stay. He was very loyal to Dolores. She was the wife of his friend and a sweet woman.

Sir Theodore turned, bent down, and warmed his hands at the fire. Denzil sat silent. Again by the light of his own happiness he saw into the dark places of his friend's apparently fortunate life.

Suddenly Sir Theodore straightened himself up and wheeled round.

'I must stay a few minutes,' he said. 'I genuinely forgot about this affair at home.'

Even as he spoke the last two words he seemed to feel that they were full of irony, and he added:

'If one can call an apartment in a palace that doesn't belong to one, haunted by strangers a home. Francis, let me have one of those little cigars of yours. That won't take me long to smoke, and I can jump into a fiacre afterwards. It 's no distance. I should be late anyhow.'

Denzil handed his friend the cigar box in silence; then, as Sir Theodore took one and cut it, he stared into the box, hesitated, and said slowly with a half smile:

'I didn't promise I wouldn't.'

'Wouldn't what?'

'Smoke two, but——'

Sir Theodore made a dive at the box, took out a cigar, clipped it, gave it to Denzil, lit a match.

'Stick it into your mouth.'

Denzil, with a pretence of reluctance, as if overborne, obeyed. Sir Theodore held the match to the cigar, then sat down in an arm-chair, stretched out his long legs, and breathed out a deep and fervent 'Thank God!' And in silence the two friends smoked.

'I absolutely need this,' Sir Theodore said at last.

'I daresay you do,' rejoined Denzil.

'The fact is, Francis, that when a man gets to my age, if he honestly is a man, society can't be much more than a distraction to him. It may have become a habit, it may be a duty——'

'A damned diplomatic duty,' groaned Denzil from his heart.

'Which you neglect, my son! But it can no longer be an excitement, or a pleasure with any very keen edge. Now, if you and I had new hats to display——'

'*Basta! Basta!*'

They joined in a laugh.

'And yet I hate to hurt Doloretta's feelings,' Sir Theodore said.

He was grave again.

'Directly I've finished this'—he took the cigar from his mouth, looked at it with affection, then put it between his lips once more.

'Ed says you have some very interesting people.'

'Do we?'

'That's something anyhow,' remarked Denzil.

He might criticise Dolores gently to his wife, but never to her husband.

'Then—why don't you come oftener to meet them?

'You know how many duty dinners one has. And I am a bear. I can't help it. The worst of it is I hate sitting up, and never want the spectators to pitch me a bun. So even as a bear I'm a failure.'

He sent up a ring of smoke and followed it with his eyes.

'Francis, this does me good,' exclaimed Sir Theodore, sitting lower in his chair and stretching out his legs still further. 'If only Doloretta could smoke cigars! Her

activity has become terrific lately. They say Rome induces languor. That 's one of the many lies.'

'You 're active enough yourself.'

'I used to think so. Doloretta has shown me my flaccid laziness. She 's at it from morning till night. She never seems to tire.'

'Shows she 's well,' said Denzil laconically.

Sir Theodore glanced with his keen bright eyes at his friend. There was a reserve between them. He felt it, and at this moment he had a longing to be unreserved. Yet he knew well how honourable a mutual reserve can be, even between the most intimate friends. Some one has said that his silences make the great gentleman. Sir Theodore thought of that at this moment. And he changed the conversation.

'I don't like the look of things in the Balkans,' he said. 'D' you remember the *aperçu* I once gave you of Ferdinand's character?'

'I should think I do. It showed the lining.'

'I believe I was right. Of course I had special means of judging during the short time I was at Sofia. I wonder how they are going to handle things at Vienna.'

The sound of the last word seemed to startle him, although he had spoken it. And now the outburst came. In this matter at least reserve was not necessary. He must have the relief of frankness in some direction.

'Francis, what a fool, what a damned fool I was to get out of the service!' he exclaimed.

'You were,' Denzil said soberly.

'The devil enters into us at times. That 's certain. But that all my training should go for nothing! I can say that in my career I never made a *gaffe*——'

'Wish I could!' muttered Denzil, thinking of Mrs. Slingsby.

'And to go and ruin the whole thing in a moment of temper. For that was what it was. I lost my temper and threw the whole thing away. After Stockholm I was bound to get an embassy. I ought to have had Vienna of course. But still—we human wretches act instinctively sometimes, and the instinct may chance to be wrong. But never, after what I 've done myself, could I blame the poor sinner by

instinct who, in a moment of madness, call it impulse if you like, puts the rope round his neck, pulls it, and pheugh!'

He made a gesture. Denzil seemed to see some one dangling.

'It was a tremendous mistake. I was thinking about it to-day just before you came.'

'Were you? A strong man would reconcile himself, I suppose. Of course he would. But I can't. It seems I am a weakling. That 's not a pleasant thought for a man either.'

He allowed a profound melancholy to appear in his face.

'I 've never thought you a weak man,' said Denzil slowly.

'The most real moral strength, however, certainly is to be able to endure without grumbling inevitable catastrophe.'

'You 're right. You 're right.'

'I 'm thoroughly ashamed that I haven't got it, and that I can't get it. The least I ought to do is to pay for my folly with a good face.'

'I suppose that is so. One doesn't want to be a bad loser,' said Denzil, very quietly and impersonally.

'You wouldn't be that!' his friend said, with a strong conviction.

'*Chi lo sa?*'

'You couldn't be. You wouldn't know how.'

'No credit to me then. But I haven't an idea. I haven't been tested. I 've had a wonderful run of luck.'

'And you deserve it, and Edna deserves it.'

'Ah, *she* does.'

'I treated Doloretta badly, too, by resigning without a word to her. Do you know, Francis, I sometimes think all this almost unnatural energy of hers comes partly from disappointment. She may have been secretly much more ambitious than I ever supposed. She would have made a perfect ambassadress. Sometimes I think—it may be absurd—that she 's trying to play the *rôle* this winter without—but no, she wouldn't do that. And yet, really, we might almost be in an embassy with all the people who come and go. But it 's my fault. A woman must do something. She can't sit for ever in empty rooms. And if we go out we must return civilities. Besides, we 've taken such a big apartment. I often wish to heaven we hadn't.'

He gazed gloomily into the fire, and for a moment there was silence. Then looking up he added :

I 'd rather be here a thousand times.'

My dear chap, this does very well indeed, but it 's hole in comparison with your glorious rooms.'

'A hole! Well, it 's a homely hole,' said Sir Theodore, with conviction.

His cigar was finished. Reluctantly he moved in his chair, putting his hands on its leather arms.

'I suppose I ought to go now and give Doloretta a helping hand with the hats, eh?'

'I suppose so.'

Sir Theodore was about to get up when a new atmosphere invaded the flat in the Via Venti Settembre. Uneven jumping pattering and toddling steps were heard, and small, high voices raised in a conversation so animated that a misanthrope might have been moved to misname it a row. Sir Theodore sprang up with quite youthful agility.

'Hush, Francis! Don't let 'em know!' he whispered.

And moving lightly across the room he glided, almost melodramatically, behind one of the window curtains, just as there came a battering of little fists upon the door.

Denzil, who had snatched up a book, after a pause replied :

'Come in!'

But there was no immediate entry. Broken whisperings, apparently of a hortatory nature, took the place of the former joyous intercourse. To these was presently added a peculiar sound as of what Denzil called 'scrabbling'—but very furtive scrabbling upon the door. Then the handle moved slightly. The hortatory whisperings became more sibilant, and were replied to by audible breathings. The handle was motionless; then there was more scrabbling, it moved again, shook, but did not turn. During these mysterious processes Denzil's usually stony face had become strangely expressive, as he sat holding his book upside down and staring towards the door. He was not exactly smiling, but a soft humanity that was almost like a light illuminated, changing his features, and especially his prominent almost bull-like forehead. The effect was as if the soul of the father woke and set love, as a light may be set in a window, in the face of the man.

Suddenly there was a sliding tattoo as of booted feet on the door, followed by a bump, and a small cry.

Denzil sprang up and went quickly to open the door, while Sir Theodore stuck an anxious head out from behind the window curtain.

'Now then, Vi, it 's all right! You 're not a bit hurt!' exclaimed Denzil.

The door was open. Sir Theodore quickly withdrew, like a man in a farce, and a group of three small children was revealed; one on its face and almost in the attitude of swimming, with a convulsive back; the second, a boy in a sailor suit, bent almost double in the eager endeavour to reverse the swimmer; the third, a girl, firmly planted, with a rosy face that looked almost stern, staring fixedly at the other two in a judicial attitude.

'She wanted to do it herself, so I lifted her. Iris helped,' exclaimed the boy, raising a flushed face.

'I helped,' remarked the judicial child, as if giving confirmatory evidence.

'But she squirmed too much,' added the boy.

'She did squirm,' Iris supplied.

By this time the unfortunate one was right side up in her father's arms, revealing an extremely small and pretty oval face, twisted with distress and outraged importance, and red, except for the tiny nose, from which, perhaps, the blood had been momentarily driven by the inflexible resistance to it of the door. This tiny nose was unnaturally white. The sight of it roused all Denzil's tenderness. He did not know Viola was his pet, but nevertheless she was. And now he kissed the poor nose as he bore its owner to the arm-chair.

'It 's all right, Vi. Look! Here 's Augustus been sitting beside me all this time watching the door.'

He lifted the gollywog from its angle, and placed it in the maternal arms which mechanically opened to receive it.

'He *is* pleased you 've come back and nearly opened the door yourself.'

Viola looked at the gollywog. Her small face was still working, but already the nose was resuming its natural complexion, and a certain inquiry appeared in her eyes. It was obvious that her mind was beginning to occupy itself with the sensations of Augustus.

'Is he pleased?' she lisped.

'Of course he is!' said small Theo, who was planted on the hearthrug, his mobile face as eloquently expressive of anxiety for his little sister's condition as if he were assisting at the crisis of some dangerous illness. 'Look how he's smiling!'

His thick dark hair fell over his forehead as he bent down and turned upwards the face of Augustus, which certainly wore a grotesque smile.

'He's almost laughing.'

'Is he?' murmured Viola, looking sideways at her brother, and then very earnestly at her father.

'Yes,' pronounced Iris.

'Yes, Vi,' added Denzil, firmly.

The matter was settled, and suddenly with a gesture and look of coaxing abnegation, such as only a little child is capable of, Viola hid her face against Denzil's shoulder as if to conceal the naughty fact that she was becoming quite happy again.

All this Sir Theodore watched from behind the curtain. Denzil had forgotten about him. He could see that. How natural that was! how your children must teach you to forget. When the little Viola hid her face, that was beginning to smile, against her father, Sir Theodore felt a sensation of yearning that was like a surgeon's knife exploring both body and soul. Why, why could he not have Denzil's joy? Was he never to possess the only gift he really longed for?

At this moment, for the first time, he contemplated the possibility of being unfaithful to Dolores.

Conversation of a highly animated kind was now joined upon the hearthrug. The fact of Augustus's pleasure had apparently been fully established to the satisfaction of Viola, who saw in that remarkable smile new meanings all of a nature complimentary to herself. She felt herself a source of pleasure, even of exultant admiration. And forgetting with the facility of extreme youth that she had failed to open the door, she began to revel, with Augustus, in the fact that she had nearly succeeded in opening it. 'I couldn't open the door,' was turned into, 'I nearly opened the door myself!' and all was well.

'But why are you so late home, brats? Isn't it past your time for tea?' exclaimed Denzil at length.

'Marianna allowed us to go home for a little with Boris and Anutschka,' explained Theo. 'They was on the Pincio.'

'Were on the Pincio.'

'Were'—he corrected himself with great earnestness

'Did you have tea with them?'

'No, and we are hungry now.'

'I want to eat,' said Iris weightily.

She paused, seemed to reflect, and added firmly:

'I want to drink too.'

'I wahts to dwink!' came a little gentle voice from Denzil's waistcoat.

'Come along! I'll come and have tea with you.'

Denzil got up with Viola in his arms, and suddenly recollected old Theo behind the curtain.

'By Jove!' he exclaimed, pausing.

'What's it?' cried little Theo.

He was as sharp as a needle. Now he cast a quick glance round, following his father's eyes.

'There's a bulge! I see a bulge!' he cried out. 'It's Uncle Theo!'

He darted at the curtain, and laid hold of the bulge with ardent hands. The bulge set up a powerful bass shout. Little Theo shrieked, little Viola shrieked; even Iris, like a judge, left the Bench and condescended to a joyous surprised squeal.

'Come out, Uncle Theo! Come out!' yelled little Theo, always going for the bulge, which writhed as if in agony under his imperative hands. 'Look, Iris, look, Vi, how I'm makin' Uncle Theo squirm!'

Denzil shook with laughter, and Viola opened her mouth, and held it wide open, while her eyes almost fell out of her head as they watched these truly Olympic games.

With a roar Sir Theodore burst from behind the curtain. The children fled screaming with laughter. He pursued them, caught them, held them fast. The music and the hats in the Barberini Palace were forgotten. A joyous procession marched in strict time down the passage to tea in the nursery with Marianna.

CHAPTER VIII

EARLY in the New Year, when the 'season' of Rome was about to set in, Dolores heard a rumour that startled her from the lips of Princess Manelli.

Dolores and the Princess had till now never been anything more to each other than slight acquaintances, not specially interested in each other, and meeting only in the hunting field and in general society. But with this New Year had come reasons why their relations must be changed. Now to the Princess Dolores offered a problem that had to be studied and disposed of. And to Dolores the Princess appeared in an atmosphere of passion and sorrow, wicked no doubt, and even humiliating, but nevertheless arresting.

The Princess's call to pride had been successful, and only two persons had witnessed something of the bitter truth of her nature; of her outraged vanity of a fascinating woman, her despair of a loving woman, her restless and gnawing misery of a sensual woman. These two persons were men. One was Cesare Carelli, the other Montebruno. To the rest of the world the Princess was an enigma. People of course made statements, circulated rumours, and told downright lies about her and her feelings. But if divinatory they were uninformed, and their strenuous efforts to arrive at truth by rushing along the pathway of falsehood availed them nothing. The Princess was far too clever, or too indifferent, to deny. She went about as usual, or perhaps even more than she usually did, and did not forget one of her normal occupations. And her piercing eyes were for ever on the watch. She meant to find out for herself whether there was any truth in what Montebruno had said. She had told herself that it was not true, and when she had done so she had not been trying to throw dust in her own eyes. But a jealous woman may deny that a thing is a hundred times without ceasing to watch for it, may say that she believes in another woman even to herself without ceasing secretly to distrust her.

The fact that Montebruno had asserted that Cesare was attracted by Dolores Cannynge had made Dolores new to

Princess Mancelli. Hitherto Dolores had been one of the crowd of *forestieri* that invaded Rome in the winter, to make it gay and banal, 'like a second-rate watering-place,' as the Princess sometimes almost bitterly said to her Roman intimates. Now Dolores stood out from the crowd. And the Princess felt impelled to draw nearer to her.

One or two recent circumstances had made Princess Mancelli uneasy. The hunting season had provided a great surprise for Rome. It was announced in *La Tribuna* that Cesare Carelli had sold his hunters and would not be seen in the field. As he always hunted both with the foxhounds and with Marchese Casati's staghounds, and as hunting was notoriously his principal pleasure, his friends had some reason to be astonished. But very soon the cause of his defection was rumoured. He had been Princess Mancelli's 'lead,' and since the change in their relations he did not care to be in her company. She stuck to her hunting, so he gave up his. It was very simple.

To the Princess's subtle mind it seemed almost too simple. She knew Cesare's passion for hunting, a passion with two strains in it, man's normal and brutal joy in the chase, and a Roman's adoration of his campagna. There was romance in Cesare's hunting. Had she not shared it once? It was in the field that she had first fallen in love with the handsome boy whose fate she had ruthlessly grasped with her experienced hands. No one in Rome knew, as she knew, what the resignation of this pleasure must mean to Cesare.

Lady Cannynge had given up hunting also. Montebruno had assured the Princess that Cesare had intended to hunt, and had repeated to her the conversation at the Countess Boccara's dinner, when Dolores announced that she would not go out with the hounds that winter. Cesare's decision, he said, must have been prompted by Lady Cannynge's. Although he had been explaining a gambling system to the little Boccara it seemed he had missed little of Cesare's talk with his companion. Princess Mancelli began to wonder whether Lady Cannynge was a cleverer woman than she had supposed, whether beneath the mask of wistful sincerity was concealed an aptitude for subterranean intrigue.

Although Princess Mancelli was more brilliant, and far more subtle, than Cesare, she shared r[illegible]

and even more markedly than he had the Italian point of view. When she became interested in Lady Cannynge she began to examine, as much as she could, into the state of things in the Cannynge ménage. And she very soon knew of Sir Théodore's perpetual visits to the Denzils. On these visits she put exactly the same construction as did Cesare. She wondered very much what Lady Cannynge thought of them, and longed to find out. If, as she believed, Lady Cannynge loved her husband, she must be suffering keenly. But possibly the Cannynge ménage was one of those cynical unions, common enough in certain circles of society, in which the only real link is a mutual hypocrisy designed to deceive the world. Possibly Lady Cannynge, like Sir Théodore, had her 'little distractions.'

Then the Princess's mind went to Cesare, and she was assailed by doubts.

About this time fate put into her possession a means of applying a test to Dolores. At the British Embassy she chanced to overhear Francis Denzil make this remark in a low voice to his wife: 'I wonder if Munich has a climate that is good for young children.' Mrs. Denzil merely looked at her husband with raised eyebrows, and Princess Mancelli spoke to Hereward Arnold about hunting. Early the next morning she sent Dolores a note asking her to come in that afternoon to meet a few people *en intimité*. And then she forgot to invite the few people.

The Princess lived in the Palazzo Urbino on Monte Savello, not far from the ancient Ghetto of Rome. To reach it Dolores had to drive through a section of the old and mysterious part of the city. She had, of course, often done this before.

Nevertheless, on this occasion—she did not know why—she seemed to be aware of old Rome as she had never yet been aware of it, to be struck by it with a sad force, to draw the impression of it into her very soul.

It was rather late in the day when she left the Barberini Palace in an open victoria. All day there had been sirocco, and it still persisted. The sickly wind that blew through the streets had not fallen with the approach of evening. The fading away of the light made the warmth that prevailed through the city seem more than ever unnatural in this

season of winter. Dolores loved heat, but this heat repelled, almost frightened her. She had known this sensation akin to fear more than once on winter days of sirocco. Almost immediately after she had started she began to wish that instead of driving in an open carriage she had shut herself up in the motor. But she had wanted to get some air. She had imagined it would refresh her. That was a mistake.

How sad Rome seemed to her just then, mysteriously sad! People were filling the streets, as they always do towards evening. The pavements were thronged with pedestrians. At every moment the horns of motors sounded. By the Via Tritone the carriage descended in to the Corso Umberto Primo and followed it for some distance. Here the crowd was immense, and the lines of carriages and motors could only move on slowly. Now and then in some spacious car Dolores caught sight of a face she knew, of gazing eyes, a smart hat, a bunch of carnations or lilac; beauty in her moving and scented room watching to see whether she was being watched. The men on the pavements stared and made their comments. Tourists and citizens pushed their way towards the Caffé Aragno which many Italians use almost as a club. Young girls promenaded with their mothers, looking modestly down, yet not altogether unhappily conscious that they were being closely and constantly regarded by the many students who passed slowly by, and by the old and the youthful flaneurs who never miss their evening Corso. Boys cried papers, and here and there old seated women, with wrinkled and apathetic faces, sold them. And over and through all this crowd, up the narrow and famous street with its tall houses and ancient palaces, its brilliantly lighted shops, its restaurants and caffés, the warm and unnatural wind went gustily, intrusive and depressing. Never had any panorama of humanity, moving amid lights and the sounds of traffic, seemed so artificial to Dolores as did the panorama of the Corso that evening. But presently the carriage turned aside, and for a brief space traversed another world, old, dark, mysterious and sad on this windy evening, but sad with a dignity, a romance, that demanded reverence rather than pity. Very brief was this glimpse of old Rome which Dolores had. It was almost as if, in passing through a room, she glanced at two or three

wonderful etchings. A corner of a dark palace, towering towards the sky where the night was unfolding her dusky garments and trailing them over the world; huge barred windows; an immense arch gaping to show the shadows of a courtyard, with faint silhouettes of growing things; a splash of yellow light from a porter's lodge falling on a spray of water; more barred windows and towering blocks of stone; a church with a sleeping beggar huddled on its deserted steps; gaunt houses of poor people with flat façades stained with innumerable shades of yellow, orange, browns, greys; an antiquity shop with dusky draperies pinned and nailed at the jambs of its doors, scraps of pottery showing strange pallors, a bronze faun dancing in semi-darkness. And the warm and gusty wind penetrated everywhere, and the dull roll of traffic on uneven pavements, and the cries of humanity, sounded always. By the light of a guttering candle Dolores saw the keeper of the antiquity shop bending and speaking to a woman wrapped in a shawl. Their colloquy seemed mysterious, almost terrible. They moved and vanished among dim shapes of furniture and hanging antique lamps.

The carriage turned into the Via di Monte Savello out of a sort of market-place, now empty, and suddenly the wheels were crunching on gravel, and the sound of a fountain for an instant saluted, then died away from the ears of Dolores. Trees were around her instead of houses. She had passed unexpectedly into one of the small but aristocratic gardens of Rome. As the carriage drew up under a colonnade she heard the creaking of a palm in the wind. She shivered. And it seemed to her as if it was the sad warmth which made her shiver. In imagination she still saw the antiquary and the woman wrapped in a shawl, vanishing among the half-seen furniture and the antique hanging lamps, going into dusty darkness. Would they ever return, see the sun? They seemed to her symbolic shapes, horribly expressive, horribly suggestive of the fates of the many who go down into blackness.

How absurd she was this evening! The sadness of Rome obsessed her.

There was no porter. The footman got down and rang a bell on the left of the entrance, where there was a door

stained black. After a long pause he rang a second time. Two or three minutes passed; then the door was slightly opened, and the lined, dark face of a very sad and distinguished-looking old gentleman appeared, lit up by the ray from a candle. The footman asked for the Principessa Mancelli.

'She lives on the first floor,' said the old gentleman, in a hollow voice. 'This is Prince Urbino's apartment.'

He closed the door. It was the Prince himself.

As Dolores mounted the broad flight of stone steps which led to the first floor of the palace she longed to be among people in brilliantly lighted rooms, and when the Maestro di Casa showed her in she listened expectantly for the murmur of voices. But she heard no sound as she walked forward through drawing-room after drawing-room, till she came into a smaller boudoir, with a splendid antique blue and gold ceiling. Here tea was laid. But there was no one.

She was surprised, and wondered if she had mistaken the day as she sat down on a sofa to wait.

The room was skilfully broken up, and very handsomely furnished. It was not cosy in the English sense, but for the room of an Italian it was very comfortable, and even suggested a woman who was fond of luxury. The colours in it were dim and soft, deep reds and warm red-browns. There was a great deal of very dark wood, that seemed to hold a wonderful bloom of hoary age. There were high bureau-like writing-tables, piled with photographs and books. Heavy vases of Oriental china were lifted up on stands shaped like columns. The sofas were deep and low, with immense cushions scattered over them. Some of the chairs were tall, with arms made of straps of magnificent old leather attached to uprights of oak carved with the heads of lions. Electric lights were concealed in torch-like contrivances of finely wrought but heavy ironwork. Nearly everything in the room was on a rather large scale. There were corners, half hidden by damask screens, into which people might retire and be lost in a warm dimness.

A door, concealed by a red hanging, opened, and the Princess came towards Dolores, holding out her hands in greeting. She had a magnificent carriage, a magnificent, yet quite simple, way of walking, such as is still characteristic

of high-bred Roman ladies, and is inimitable. It is a movement which looks almost imperial, yet not trampling or arrogant.

'*Ben venuta!*' she said, with a delightfully warm and unstudied cordiality.

'Then you did expect me! I was afraid for a moment I had mistaken the day.'

'Because there is as yet no one?'

The Princess sat down in front of the tea-table.

'Benedetto!' she called.

The old *Maestro di Casa* reappeared, and the Princess, speaking to him with familiarity, almost as to a friend of years with whom no ceremony was necessary, asked him to alter the lighting of the room. As he went about from one tall torch to another, turning lights off and on, he spoke to the Princess in Italian and she replied.

'*Bene così*,' she said at last.

The old man—he looked like an old gentleman—went away through the vista of empty drawing-rooms, satisfied apparently that he would not be wanted again, and the Princess poured out tea.

'We have had bad luck to-day,' she said. 'I only asked three or four, and they couldn't come. The beautiful Verona——'

'Oh, how I admire her!' said Dolores. 'To me she almost incarnates Rome.'

'How much more to us Romans! She had gone to Cisterna for the night. Maria Carpacci is playing bridge at the Austrian Embassy. But one or two men will drop in presently. Meanwhile I cannot be sorry. When do I get a little talk with you?—a real talk, I mean?'

'Very seldom,' said Dolores.

She felt a sudden slight thrill of something that was almost suspicious, and wondered whether the Princess had really invited any one to meet her.

'In Rome one seldom gets much beyond acquaintanceship,' she added. 'Unless one plays bridge.'

'Why don't you play?'

'I can, of course. But I don't care much about it.'

'No? I play a great deal. Bridge has one supreme merit.'

What is that?'

It takes possession of the mind. While one is playing one is absorbed and can think of nothing else.'

Dolores looked at the Princess in silence. For a moment the latter had surely been off her guard, and had spoken out of her heart. Perhaps she realised this, for she added, rather quickly:

'It obliges one to collect the wandering thoughts, to concentrate. And without concentration we can do nothing worth doing, be nothing worth being. Isn't it so?'

'I dare say it is. But I think lots of people are concentrated on things that are very absurd.'

The Princess smiled, rather cynically.

'Of course they are, poor things! Your friend, the little Boccara, for instance, thinks only of her waist. Still, one must say that she achieves her object. She has the smallest waist in Rome. And what more can any woman want?'

'Do you despise women?'

'I! But I am a woman! Would you have me despise myself?'

'I think a good many of us——

Dolores stopped.

'You are quite right, and I agree with you,' said the Princess, laughing.

Dolores laughed too, but without any genuine mirth.

'I do not apologise,' she said. 'I feel with you it is unnecessary. Let us hope men are as secretly modest in regard to themselves as you and I seem to be.'

'They are not, believe me.'

Sitting alone with this Roman lady Dolores felt almost like a child, and oddly inexperienced. She was conscious of being in an atmosphere of power. Beneath the apparently unconscious cordiality of the Princess she divined subtlety, and something else, that she surely did not possess. She could not perhaps have said exactly what it was, but she knew it was something strong, vital, and not cold. She felt both attracted by, and repelled by, this woman; keenly interested in her, and yet unwilling to draw very near to her. All the time that she sat with the Princess Cesare Carelli hovered, like a shade, on the threshold of her mind. She disliked thinking of Cesare while she was with the Princess.

As she was not at all prurient-minded such a thought, which was a link, distressed her interior purity. Yet she could not banish it, and she felt as if the Princess must be aware of it.

And while Dolores was mentally linking the Princess with Cesare, the Princess was mentally linking him with her visitor. Could what Montebruno had said be true? Now that she was isolated with Lady Cannynge the Princess felt almost sternly conscious of the power of her own nature. This gentle woman was certainly not wax. The firmly closed lips showed that. But neither was she granite. And was not she, Lisetta Manelli, granite? Yet perhaps that very softness might draw a man away by. She could seem soft, could be passionately tender, yielding with the almost desperate abandon great natures develop in love. But she was conscious that she had within her much of the strong fibre of the ruler. The woman facing her was surely born to yield, and to be cherished, sheltered, perhaps worshipped by strength.

As these thoughts slipped through the Princess's mind she was invaded by a cold sensation of impotence.

If only she knew whether Montebruno had got at the truth, or a part of the truth!

'And we do not want them to be modest. The modest man is the last man to triumph over a woman. And we long to be triumphed over,' she said.

'Do you?'

As the Princess considered the softness of Dolores, so Dolores considered the seductive energy so apparent in her hostess. And she found it difficult to imagine the greatest failure in life emerging in withered blackness from such a soil.

'Why not?' asked the Princess.

'Somehow I cannot imagine any one, or any thing, triumphing over you,' said Dolores, slowly and apparently with great sincerity.

'That is a compliment which I appreciate. But is it always wise to judge by the physique?'

'But was I doing that?'

'Weren't you?'

As she spoke the Princess leaned slowly forward on the sofa towards the tea-table. The *Maestro di Casa* had

manipulated the lights until no strong ray fell upon his mistress, as she was placed while he was in the room.

Now, however, she deliberately entered the circle of radiance that was produced by a lamp on the left of Dolores; moved, perhaps, by an impulse not free from morbidity.

'I think you were,' she added.

Both these women were secretly being prompted by a common desire, and both were being kept back from any open attempt at its gratification by a furtively warning voice. Now Dolores looked at her hostess for a moment in silence; and as she looked, in despite of herself, she thought with intensity of that rumoured past which Cesare Carelli had shared.

'Have I judged wrongly then?' she said at last.

'Why not? I am the Roman type. And that type often looks more conquering than it is. The great days of Rome are long past, you must remember.'

'And the *Risorgimento*?'

The face of the Princess softened strangely. Her eyes lost their piercing quality, and for a moment regarded Dolores with almost a melting look. Then the sweetness died out of them, and she answered:

'Do you believe in Resurrection? I don't know that I do. But I 'm quite sure that nothing rises again exactly as it formerly was. And as to the new Rome—well!'

She leaned back, spreading out her exquisite hands in a gesture that seemed to ward off from her something that sought to approach. And Dolores had the feeling that as she withdrew her face at that moment from the circle of light, so she withdrew her real self, retiring into the darkness. From out of this darkness she said:

'We were talking of bridge just now. I was playing last night at the British Embassy, and I heard a good deal of Embassy gossip.'

'Did you? Anything amusing?'

The voice of Dolores suddenly sounded almost sharply alert.

'It seems young Myles-Anson is desperately in love with Mrs. Tooms, the American widow beloved of Count Boccara.'

'Poor boy!'

The alertness was gone from the voice.

'He even takes the youngest child out roller-skating while the mamma is at the Excelsior gaming—well, not into space. No Italian would do that.'

'Do you admire or condemn such a proof of affection?'

'Frankly, I don't admire it at all. I think it servile in a man.'

'A boy.'

'At twenty-three! Our boys are men long before that age.'

She said this with a strong decisiveness, as if almost defiantly stating a fact that cannot be controverted, but that may not be readily accepted.

'By the way, I met that good domesticated Denzil at the Embassy,' she added. 'How delightfully English he is! You don't mind my saying that?'

'Of course not. Yes, Francis Denzil is very English.'

'I should think he might be very much liked by South Germans.'

'By South Germans?'

'On account of his directness and simplicity of manner.'

'I daresay. But I don't quite see what South Germans have to do with the question of Mr. Denzil's character.'

'I mean if he goes to Munich.'

'To Munich! Mr. Denzil!'

There was a startled sound in the voice of Dolores.

'Mr. Denzil is going to Munich?'

Princess Mancelli seemed to hesitate. She put out her hand and moved the china in front of her, looking down. Then she said:—

'I'm afraid I've behaved as they say Mr. Denzil does sometimes. I'm afraid I've made a *gaffe*.'

Dolores had had time to regain the outward self-control which she felt she had lost for a moment. She was frightened by the violent shock of joy which the unexpected words of her hostess had given her. She felt almost as if she had just been stabbed by joy, and longed to put out her hand to her breast as if to cover a wound. But she succeeded in looking and seeming quite calm, perhaps almost exaggeratedly calm, as she said, not without languor:

'A *gaffe*? But why? Rumours of this sort are always floating about Rome.'

'You had heard nothing of it?'

'Nothing at all. I don't think it can be true.'

'Why not?'

'If it were I think I must have heard of it.'

'Perhaps it is a diplomatic secret.'

Dolores wondered very much from whom the Princess had heard it, but she did not choose to ask.

'Is Mr. Denzil to be made a minister then?' she said. 'At least, is that the rumour?'

'I understand so.'

The Princess leaned slightly forward.

'I suppose it is nearly time, isn't it? And quite between ourselves, I suspect your Embassy people wouldn't be altogether sorry to get Mr. Denzil out of Rome.'

'But why? He's very clever.'

'Oh well'—often when the Princess was asked a direct question the secretiveness characteristic of the Roman race took possession of her. 'There may have been little things—I don't know. Does he always get on with the other diplomats? I had an idea there had been some fuss with a certain ambassador.'

Dolores, like every one else, had heard of the Tomtit affair.

'There was,' she said.

'Well then?'

There was a pause. Then Dolores repeated,

'I think I must have heard of it. My husband knows the Denzils so well.'

Not by the sound of her voice, but by the turn of her phrase, the Princess knew that Dolores was jealous of the Denzils.

'Yes, of course you are very intimate with them,' she replied, including Dolores with a touch of delicate malice. 'Still things often get out in Rome without any definite revelations by the persons most interested. And besides—forgive me! I don't think the English are specially clever at keeping their secrets.'

She spoke lightly, smiling.

'Don't you? But we are said to be so reserved.'

'So you often are, in manner. But it wants more than mere manner to keep a secret fast.'

'A famous American once told me he thought the English

the subtlest nation in Europe, the cleverest in diplomacy, and the most insincere in public affairs.

'Certainly you have generally got what you wanted. And that is perhaps the greatest test of ability in life.'

'To get and—to keep,' murmured Dolores.

She really said this to herself, and almost unconsciously. But it touched the Princess on the raw.

'You English know how to keep. Nobody doubts that,' she said.

She longed to speak fiercely so she spoke quietly, and as she looked at Dolores she strove deliberately to veil the fire in her eyes. At this moment she hated Dolores, because Dolores had hurt her, and she longed to strike back. But though her secret anger partially submerged her intelligence it did not affect her native caution. She was inclined now to believe ill of her visitor, to believe that Dolores was perhaps *une petite chatte* whose sharp claws were generally padded with velvet, but who was capable of playing a double part, of both stroking and wounding. But she only allowed herself a light irony, as she added:

'And perhaps your American was right. Perhaps you are past masters and mistresses in that art.'

'What art?'

'Perhaps you know how to *jouer le monde* far better than we Latins do, despite our apparent suppleness of mind.'

She was going to say more, but she stopped. She was sitting with her face turned towards the vista of drawing-rooms, and at this moment she saw detach itself from the farthest gloom the short, square-built figure of a man walking slowly, almost meditatively, towards her.

'Here comes some one who may be able to tell us, if he chooses.'

Dolores turned her head.

'Who?' she asked.

'Pacci,' said the Princess.

Still walking slowly and meditatively the square-built figure approached, and entered the room where the two women sat, with a tread that sounded heavily even upon the thick carpet which covered the whole of the floor.

'Pacci, *buona sera*,' said the Princess.

As she said it, as she held out her hand to the newcomer.

she was changed. To Dolores she seemed suddenly to become more foreign, more definitely Italian, and gentler. Something that was almost like tenderness appeared in her dark face. It was obvious to Dolores that the man who now very seriously, and almost heavily, bowed over the outstretched hand, was regarded with affection by the Princess.

Giosuè Pacci was a man well known in, yet not really, well known by, Rome. He was a Roman, and not an aristocrat, yet he had conquered a position in the aristocratic world. Such an achievement is rare in Rome, where the middle-class never mixes in society with the aristocratic class. Perhaps it had been accomplished partly by the curious power of indifference. Pacci was indifferent to social distinctions. Indeed he scarcely seemed to know what they were. He was erudite and lived often in dreams. And he did not mind dreaming in public, at dinners, and at receptions. He was quite unworldly. Completeness often has an almost mysterious attraction, especially for the incomplete. The thoroughness of Pacci's indifference and unworldliness had certainly made an impression upon the worldly Rome. And Pacci combined these rare qualities with great kindness of heart and great romance of spirit.

He was probably the most really romantic person in all Rome, but not in connection with human beings. He had a deep and a strong passion for beauty, but often scarcely knew whether he was being talked to by a lovely or a plain woman.

Nature was his mistress, and all the old and inanimate glories and beauties of the world. He planted flowers to mark the sites of buried temples, and a dead city meant more to him than any woman laid out for burial, with lighted candles about her, and mourners praying for the peace of her soul.

He bowed very low, almost with a simple reverence, over the Princess's hand, till his short, thick, black beard was pressed against his broad chest. Then, lifting himself up, he looked with his small almost childlike blue-grey eyes at Dolores.

"Surely you know Lady Cannynge, Pacci!

'No, only my husband,' I think,' Dolores said, giving him her hand.

He took it, bowed again, and sat down with the air of a child well satisfied to find itself at home.

'Shall we ask him?' inquired the Princess of Dolores, as she handed to Pacci a plate of long and sticky dainties, made of pastry and currant jam.

She did not offer him tea. He never took it.

'I don't think Signor Pacci would give us an answer to such a question,' said Dolores.

Pacci began to eat one of the pastry cakes with relish.

He did not look interested. Nor did he ask what the question was. And his gentle indifference fascinated Dolores.

'Let us find out,' rejoined the Princess. Pacci!—Pacci?'

Pacci looked up.

'*Ebbene!*' he observed in a muffled voice.

'Now, we are going to talk English.'

'Very well,' he said calmly, speaking English with an extraordinary accent which no system of spelling could convey to the mind.

'We wish you to tell us whether you consider the Anglo-Saxon or the Latin race the most subtle.'

Pacci looked at the room, not at his companions. He had finished the pastry.

'Subtle,' he said; 'and by that—you mean?'

He paused.

'Well, we were speaking of being subtle in the sense of being able to deceive others, to *jouer le monde*.'

Pacci looked thoughtful and grave.

'Those who deceive easily in small things are usually shallow-brained,' he said, 'like the curious and the gossips. You remember Nietzsche's Ear big as a man—in *Zarathustra*, perched on a slender stalk, its homunculus, with a small envious countenance. And against the stalk dangled a bloated soullet—shallow-brained! Shallow-brained! And shallow-souled!'

His curiously muffled voice, which sometimes sounded like the voice of a child, seemed to stray among the words vaguely. It was wandering almost as the voice of a stream, and at moments was so withdrawn that it nearly disappeared.

'Arabs love to trick those about them in trifling matters,

but very seldom do they bring any great matter to a satisfactory conclusion. The Chinese—as we know from *Il Tao di Laotsen*, or road of virtue, written by the philosopher Laotse some five hundred years before Christ——'

Dolores began to smile.

'Never mind Chinese philosophers, *caro* Pacci,' interrupted the Princess at this point. 'Leave them to their bird's-nest soup. You are with women, try to remember. Consider us among the number of the shallow-brained, if you like, but tell us whether the English or the Italian is the subtler nation.'

'Macchiavelli,' murmured Pacci, 'fourteen sixty-nine—fifteen twenty-seven—Voltaire—sixteen ninety-four—seventeen seventy-eight——'

'Pacci, you are vaguer than ever to-day. I am sure Voltaire was never an Englishman at any time in his varied and tumultuous career.'

For the first time Pacci looked steadily at her.

'I was going to England, Principessa.'

'By way of France! Then I beg your pardon. But never mind historical personages. Be modern, Pacci, for once, and look at the nations as they are to-day.'

Pacci held out his hand for another of the sticky cakes which he specially loved.

'And the sexes, Principessa?' he said, still in his extraordinary English which was as a new language invented by himself. 'The sexes?

'We know about them. Women are much more subtle than men.'

Pacci slowly shook his head.

'You think not?' asked Dolores.

All this time she had been listening intently. The entrance of this unusual man had brought to her a strange feeling of calm, as if she became conscious of the profound repose of inanimate things in the immense spaces of the world.

'Men—men are the deceivers. I am not taking it from Weininger—a genius with germs of madness. Look into history——'

'We shall do nothing of the kind, my dear Pacci,' said the Princess with velvety firmness. 'Nothing of the kind.'

She turned towards Dolores.

'Pacci is always like this,' she said, talking about her guest as if he were not there. 'You ask for an opinion and he tries to give you a history of mankind. We had better give it up. You must have your cup of milk, Pacci.'

She poured some milk into a tea-cup, put in three lumps of sugar, and handed it to him.

The mental atmosphere in the room was completely changed since Pacci's entrance. Subtly, without doing anything, he had for the moment united the two women who had been, who would be again, very far apart. They were now feeling alike. They were feeling maternal. Pacci sipped his milk, with almost as much relish as a baby displays when the tube of its bottle is introduced into its O of a mouth. Then, setting down the cup, he remarked:

'I have been all day in the Campagna.'

'What have you been doing there?'

'Walking alone—with sirocco!'

His eyes became full of reverie. As she regarded him the Princess had again the soft look in the eyes which transformed her usually rather imperious, though often seductive face. This look simplified her appearance wonderfully.

'*Lo so—lo so!*' she said.

For a moment there was a silence. In it Dolores thought of Cesare Carelli, and of his almost violent love for the strange and exquisite country in the midst of which lies Rome; Rome with its history of glory and crime, and decadence and ruin: Rome with its secrets, its kisses, its knife thrusts, and its tears: Rome with its new aspirations, its lures for the gold-bug and the women who scatter, its charms and its banalities of a second-rate watering-place: Rome with its palace where dwells, so millions believe, the Holy Spirit of God: Rome with its poor little Dolores, and her trouble of a woman, which seemed to her sometimes as great as the world.

In that moment of silence Dolores, through the silent woman and man she was with, began for the first time faintly to realise the wonder of the Campagna, whose shepherds decreed Rome, to think of it almost as one thinks of a great personality.

'Tieniti puro nella quiete Non lasciarti turbare dalla

tempesta. Piu che tu sentirai di essere uomo piu ti assomiglierai agli Dei.'

It was the voice of Pacci, speaking to himself, as he had spoken to himself through the long day in the grey Campagna, where towards sunset the isolated pine-trees had floated like mysterious vessels for a moment on the breast of a golden sea.

'Tieniti puro nella quiete—nella quiete.'

As Dolores went away, and was lost in the vista of faintly lit rooms, the Princess said to her companion:

'Pacci, I want you to tell me. What do you think of that lady of Lady Cannynge?'

Pacci looked rather distressed. Evidently he did not think almost anything, either good or bad.

'She is not—I believe—a disturbing influence,' he dropped out at length. 'At least—not to-day. Yesterday—to-morrow—*chi lo sa?*'

'Yes, but didn't you get any impression as to her nature?

It was seldom that with her spoilt Pacci the Princess was so persistent.

'Nero undoubtedly had a dual nature. Once when I was at Sublaqueum with Antiochi——'

The Princess lay back on her sofa and closed her eyes.

CHAPTER IX

As Dolores slowly descended the staircase of the Palazzo Urbino she was still, so it seemed to her, almost mysteriously aware of Pacci. The personality of this short and bearded man, who loved sticky cakes and sugared milk, had enfolded the suspicions, the miseries, the secret hostility and the misunderstanding of the Princess Mancelli and herself with its peculiar and beautiful calm and simplicity, almost as the Campagna enfolds the cries, the crimes, and the sorrows of Rome with its strange and romantic tranquillity. But when she emerged from the palace, and saw the misty darkness of the starless sky above her, she forgot Giosuè

Pacci. As she drove back through old Rome she was conscious that she was a different woman from the Dolores who had so sadly, so almost fearfully, regarded the mysterious city but a little while before. She knew it when she again passed the antiquary's shop. By the faint light of an old lamp she saw the owner seated, leaning forward, in a large chair, surrounded by shapes and silhouettes of mysteries. But she thought of him now as a comfortable citizen, resting after the successful labours of the day. The warm wind still blew gustily through the narrow and tortuous streets, but it was no longer unnatural and sickly; it was just the sirocco that sometimes comes to Italy, and that soon gives place to the tonic and blithe Tramontana.

Perhaps the Denzils were going to leave Rome! Only now she knew how much she had been suffering. She grasped at relief, and would not question it during the drive home. But when she came into their apartment, and saw her husband reading under a shaded electric light, she felt uncertainty within her, and knew she must lay it to rest if possible.

'How late you are, Doloretta!

Sir Theodore laid down his book on his knee and pulled his pointed beard once. Another book lay open on a small table beside him. Dolores went to him and took the volume up.

'Gogol!' she said. 'And you are reading it in the original!'

'Trying to with the translation at hand.'

'You must have got on splendidly.'

'One has a lot of time here. But where have you been, and why do you look so animated?'

He gazed up at her, and his eyes were bright with a genuine curiosity.

'I don't know when I've seen you look so full of life,' he added, almost with suspicion.

A faint embarrassment clouded the face of Dolores.

She turned away and sat down.

'I've only been having tea with Princess Mancelli.

Sir Theodore looked rather surprised, and not altogether pleasantly surprised.

'A tea-party, I suppose?'

'No.'

'I didn't know the Princess and you were so friendly.'

'Friendly! She asked me and I thought I would go. She had invited some people, I believe. But none came except, at the end, Commendatore Pacci.'

'Pacci! The historian!'

Sir Theodore's keen face softened.

'He's a good little fellow. Could you get anything out of him?'

'Not very much—that is in words. But——'

She hesitated. She hardly cared to say to any one how strong and peculiar had been Pacci's influence in the Princess's drawing-room.

'I know. His silence is pervasive and means very much.'

'You know him, Theo, don't you?'

'Yes.'

'Try to bring him here.'

'Another lion for your salon.'

There was a touch of slight sarcasm in his voice. Dolores faintly reddened. Could not Theo see that it was for him she was trying to make their home interesting, attractive? Could he not see that all she was doing was being done for him? A sort of despair seized her at the blindness of men. But she shook it off as she thought of the news of that day.

'Is he a lion?'

'Of course.'

'Well, I was thinking of him only as an unusual man.'

'He is very unusual. He's a small man, but he makes small things seem nothings by his interior greatness.'

'Yes.'

'You felt that?'

She was rather startled by his emphasis, by the way he moved, leaning towards her, and she felt immediately inclined to shrink back into reserve.

'I was taking it from you, Theo. I scarcely know Signor Pacci. But I think I should like to.'

Very well, Doloretta. I will try to get him here.'

Thank you.'

And how was the Princess?'

Very pleasant.'

She is of the ancient Roman breed at heart, I believe,'

said Sir Theodore, rather thoughtfully, 'not a woman to be trifled with.'

If he was thinking about the Princess's connection with Carelli he did not say so.

'Oh, by the way,' said Dolores, as if suddenly remembering something. 'The Princess surprised me very much by one thing she told me. I don't think it can be true.'

'What was it?'

'It was about the Denzils.'

'The Denzils!' said Sir Theodore.

With a quick movement he lifted the book from his knees and laid it on the table beside him.

'What about the Denzils?' he added.

'The Princess said she had heard that Francis won't stay here much longer, that he is probably going to Munich as minister. Do you think there can be anything in it? Surely we must have heard of it. But perhaps you have heard of it?'

'Francis—going to Munich!' said Theodore. 'Absurd! What will they say next?'

'You mean that you know it isn't true?'

'Of course it isn't true. I've never heard a word of it.'

'Well, but——'

'My dear Doloretta, ask yourself, does any one in Rome know Francis as I do?'

His deep voice sounded almost angry. She looked at him, and it seemed to her that she saw resentment shining in his eyes.

'Can you conceive Francis telling such a thing to Princess Manecelli before he told it to me?' he continued. 'Let us be reasonable, even in Rome.'

'But, Theo—I never said——'

'No, no! But you evidently thought it possible.'

Scarcely ever before had Dolores heard him speak to her with such almost sharp irritation.

'Of course if it had really been settled Francis would have told you before any one. He always puts you first, and he is such a loyal friend,' she said.

Sir Theodore made no answer. He pulled at his beard, and stared before him for a moment. Then he got up from his chair.

'We're dining at home to-night,' he said. 'Do you mind saying half-past eight instead of eight for dinner?'

'Of course not.'

'Did the Princess say how she had heard this absurd rumour?'

'No.'

'Did she appear to believe it?'

'I think she did.'

Sir Theodore uttered a half-muffled exclamation of contemptuous impatience and went out of the room.

Dolores knew very well where he was going. He was going to the flat in the Via Venti Settembre to find out the truth—and for her, for her, as well as for himself.

She rang the bell and put off dinner till half-past eight. Then she went to her bedroom, took off her hat and veil, and her jacket, and returned to the drawing-room, to wait for Theo's return. She took up the volume of Gogol he had been studying, and sat down where he had been sitting. She felt highly nervous and restless, but she forced herself to sit still. Opposite to her was the Lenbach portrait of the old man with the heavily veined face and the piercingly intelligent eyes. To-night those eyes seemed to be full of a malicious scrutiny as they regarded her. The original of the portrait was long since dead, and Dolores knew it. Nevertheless she felt as if his acute mind, somewhere, must know all that was passing through hers this evening, all of agitation, desire, opposition, and fear.

How she wished, prayed, that what Princess Mancelli had said about Denzil being removed to Munich might be true! And yet something within her fought against that wish, strove to prevent that prayer. For she loved Theo and hated to see him suffer, even though his suffering was necessary if she were to be relieved of her burden. And what a heavy, almost crushing burden it had been! Then she was selfish, she forgot to pity Theo, and again she prayed that the Denzils might go away, soon, very soon.

It was just striking eight o'clock when Sir Theodore re-entered the room. Dolores cast a swift glance at his face and knew.

'Have you been out, Theo? It's nearly time to dress. Eight o'clock.'

He looked mechanically towards the clock. Its delicate chime died away.

'Yes, I have been out.'

He came up to the hearth. She thought he looked almost defiant, and his voice was unusually hard as he continued:

'I've been to the flat to ask Francis whether there was any truth in that report about Munich. Edna was away at Frascati for the night with her mother.'

There was a deliberate carelessness in his way of speaking.

'Was Francis in?'

'Yes.'

'And is there any truth in the report?'

'It seems there is.'

There was a pause. Then Dolores said:

'How very odd of Francis not to let you know.'

'Old Francis can keep a thing dark even from his friend.'

He stood looking straight before him at the frieze of the dancing boys. Then, turning, he said:

'Princess Manelli gave you no hint at all as to how she knew about this—this project?'

'None at all. She said she had been playing bridge at the British Embassy.'

'She certainly can't have heard of it there. The reason I ask is that Francis seemed—in fact he was—very much surprised and disgusted at the thing having got out. Nobody knew it, except, of course, Edna, according to him.'

'Nobody!'

'Except two or three in the inner circle who would never dream of talking. Not that the matter's of particular importance. But Francis didn't wish anything said till the affair was settled.'

'And isn't it settled?'

Again he glanced at her almost with suspicion. But she managed to look quite unconcerned, controlling her eyes though she had perhaps not controlled her voice.

'I think Francis will go to Munich.'

As he spoke gloom overspread his face. For a moment he had been thinking of his wife, observing her, perhaps wondering about her. Now he was concentrated on himself.

'They will be a great loss to Rome,' Dolores said.

Why she said anything so weak, so banal, so impotent, she did not know. Without any volition of hers it seemed as if the words fell out of her mouth preposterously.

'I don't know about Rome. They will be a terrible loss to us.'

There were lines now in his dark forehead, above which the thick, silvered hair lay straightly, almost in slabs.

'Francis is my oldest friend. I can drop in on him when I like, talk to him as I can talk to no man.'

'I know. Francis is such a good fellow.'

There was real sympathy in her voice now. Never had she been secretly jealous of Denzil. Lately, indeed, she had seen in him a human barricade against a threatening danger. Again and again, when she had been attacked by the cruel weapons of jealousy, the thought of Denzil had been as a shield which she had held before her, and which had defended her. How could she be genuinely jealous of Edna Denzil when Denzil was always there to be adored by his wife and to be loved and respected by his friend? If Denzil were not there! Dolores had sometimes imagined a great change—Denzil removed. And then her mind had shuddered. Emerging from the spell of that imagination she had felt almost as if she loved Denzil simply because he existed, and could make her feel by his mere existence the absurdity of her jealousy.

'If he goes Rome will seem very different to me,' said Sir Theodore, with a sort of deep almost morose melancholy that Dolores had never before seen in him.

'I know, I know. But, Theo, remember that it is only quite lately you have had Francis near you. For years——'

'My dear Doloretta! I had my work then. Do remember that! And besides, I hadn't formed the habit of dropping in perpetually on Francis. Perhaps you don't realise how much habit—especially happy habit—means to a man of my age. I don't know how I shall get on in Rome without Francis.'

'Francis! Francis! Francis! Why did he not say the truth? Why did he not say Francis, Edna, the children? That was what he meant. That was why he showed such unusual emotion. Again jealousy burned at the heart of Dolores. Her secret uncontrollable [illegible]

blighted by the words, more by the manner of her husband; and yet her feeling of misery, of impotence, and of tacit rejection was complicated by a sensation of genuine and almost maternal pity for the sorrow of the man she loved. She longed to put her arm round her husband's neck, to kiss him, to say, 'I know! I know! But I 'm here. Can't I make up? Let me try, and oh, Theo, let me—let me succeed!' How useless that would be. Her quick imagination had visualised the situation, and had seen her husband gently—oh yes, he would do it gently—take her arm from his neck with a patient air; the patient air of the superior being whose complex feelings are being completely misunderstood by the being who is inferior.

'What did we come to settle in Rome for?' continued Sir Theodore, 'if not to be within reach of Francis and Edna?'

'People are always being changed about in diplomacy.'

With all her will Dolores strove to speak naturally, quietly, impersonally.

'Of course. And I can only wish this advancement for Francis. I do wish it. But the chances were that he would remain on here very much longer. He is very happy in Rome. He 's still young. There was plenty of time. And Edna likes being near to her mother, who is permanently settled, remember, at Frascati. Still, of course, all Francis's friends ought to wish that he may get this step. Munich, too!'

Dolores knew that he was brooding at this moment on the abrupt ending of his own diplomatic career. He put both his hands on the stone of the high mantelpiece, taking hold of the columns. His chin dropped a little. For an instant he looked almost old.

'What a selfish brute I am!' he exclaimed, lifting his head and letting go of the stone.

For a moment Dolores was tricked into believing that he was going to say something tender, unselfish to her, something that would show a consciousness on his part of her bitter pain of the woman—left out. But he added, 'I ought to rejoice in this prospect for Francis, and I simply can't. My own loss dominates me. Well!'

With a gesture which seemed to indicate profound self-

contempt, but which had absolutely no reference to his wife, which might, indeed, have been made by a man entirely alone, he abruptly went out of the room.

Dolores clenched her thin hands, pressed her lips together and, after a moment of stillness, during which she was mentally staring at herself in her life, as one might stare through a window at a woman abandoned beginning to starve in an unfurnished room, she went away to dress for the *tête-à-tête* dinner with Theo.

How plainly, how brutally almost, Theo was beginning to show her his feelings. Formerly either he had felt differently, or he had been far more reticent, far more careful. Perhaps since that outburst over Nero he had been conscious of a sense of release. It was true that the silence had closed again, that Theo had never restated the truth of their married life. But had he not been more openly indifferent in action? Was he not becoming gradually careless, almost cruel in his behaviour? Was not his perpetual intercourse with the Denzils blunting his native delicacy?

At this moment the pride of Dolores was up in arms, and she began almost to hate Edna Denzil.

'My own loss dominates me!'

She had pitied Theo, she had felt tender over him. But now she knew a sensation very strange to her, of hardness. She had met hard women in her life and had always secretly shrunk from them. They had seemed to her unsexed beings. Now she began to understand them. They were women who had suffered. They had the right to be hard, bitterly merciless. In Marchesa Verosti's drawing-room the attentive eyes of women had detected a development in Dolores of which she herself was only conscious at this moment. And almost immediately she recoiled from that consciousness. The softness within her loved itself, did not want to be hurt by change. She clung to the new knowledge that the Denzils were going away from Rome. Once they were gone Theo would be released from what was becoming a thraldom, and she would be released from an obsession of jealousy that must otherwise ruin her life.

But all would soon be well. The Denzils were going away from Rome. Resolutely she hugged that thought. She dared at that moment to rely on life.

Sir Theodore made no further allusion to the Denzils and Munich that evening. At dinner he carefully and kindly made conversation to Dolores.

They had come to that, to the 'making' of conversation. She felt as if she saw the first stones of a wall, very low as yet, but solid, between them.

But the Denzils were going away, and then all would be as it had been. That condition of things was imperfect. For there was the terrible gap in their married life caused by childlessness. But now, looking back, it seemed to Dolores as if she and Theo had been wonderfully happy in the days before they came to live in Rome.

Once the Denzils were gone they would renew that happiness. For she loved Theo, and she believed, indeed she felt sure, that he still loved her; not as he had once loved her, in eager hope, in a glorious expectation, but nevertheless as he loved no other woman.

And that was true, despite the traitorous thought which had come into his mind at twilight, when he saw the little Viola nestle her face that was beginning to smile against her father's shoulder.

CHAPTER X

THREE weeks later a tall, clean-shaven, middle-aged man, with a rubicund, but rather sad face, and snow-white hair, was opening a letter received by that morning's post at his solitary breakfast-table in a house in Cavendish Square, London. The letter was from Lady Sarah Ides, and the middle-aged man was her brother-in-law, Doctor Mervyn Ides, one of the best-known throat specialists in England. In years gone by, before he had devoted himself exclusively to the treatment of the throat, Doctor Ides had been a general practitioner among the English colony in Rome, and, like most people, had succumbed to the spell of the city of fountains. Perhaps he would never have followed his real bent, and established himself in gloomy London, per-

haps he would have been kept for ever by the fascination of Italy, and been contented in comparative obscurity, if it had not been for a great sorrow which overtook him in Rome. He fell deeply in love with one of his patients, a young girl belonging to a great Italian family, and she fell in love with him. Her parents would not consent to their marriage, forbade Doctor Ides to come to the house, and in a very short time married their daughter to a dissipated young Neapolitan, with a title and a fortune which he was rapidly gambling away. So the doctor was still a bachelor, his hair was prematurely white, and he worked, as some of his colleagues half enviously said, 'like one possessed by a devil.' But he had never forgotten Rome, and his few months of romance lit by a girl's dark eyes. And even now, in his middle age, he could never think of Rome without a thrill at the heart which made him feel strangely young; a thrill in which the remembrance of intense joy was united with the remembrance of sorrow not less intense.

On this morning he had to go out at ten o'clock to perform a difficult operation. He looked at his watch, as he laid down Lady Sarah's letter. Then he ate a bit of toast. Then he took up the letter once more. And as he re-read it he dreamed. And in his dream he walked beneath tall pine trees, and down cypress avenues. And he heard the music that was to him as no other music, the soft song of the fountains of Rome rising up in the golden summer, when Italy at noonday sleeps under a rapture of blue.

He was going to take a short holiday. His sister-in-law pressed him to spend it with her in Rome.

Since he had left Italy, after his sorrow, he had never had the courage to obey his longing and to return to it; perhaps he would not have had the courage now, but for a trifling circumstance which occurred as he left his house to perform the operation. In the fog two Italians were passing by with a piano organ. When they saw the doctor they stopped, and, smiling, began to play. And the tune they played was one which he had perpetually heard in the streets of Rome.

He paused by his motor car and listened. Then he gave the Italians a shilling, got into his car, and drove away to the nursing home in Henrietta Street where his

patient was anxiously waiting for him. He had decided to 'take his courage in both hands,' and to spend his holiday in Rome. The dark-eyed girl was the mother of a family now, and probably no longer slim and intense, with a glance to wake up all the sleeping romance and desire of a man. And his hair was white! Why should he not go to Rome?

Not many mornings later he saw the acqueducts against the pale sunshine of dawn in the Campagna, the shepherds in their sheepskins and heavy cloaks, with their white dogs beside them, staring at the passing train, the snow-crowned Sabine mountains. As he walked across the Piazza delle Terme to the Grand Hotel he heard the song of the fountain. And he said to himself the word which still meant to him how much more than any other word—'Rome! Rome!'

Lady Sarah and he were great friends. Each knew of, and comprehended, the sorrows bravely borne of the other. The doctor had no intention of going into society during his short stay in Italy. He meant to spend his time quietly, seeing once more some of the many things he had cared about in former days, and in the companionship of his sister-in-law, and two or three old Italian acquaintances. The panorama of the gaiety and social life of the city would be spread out before him each evening in the restaurant and hall of the Grand Hotel, if he chose to go down to look at it. If he did not choose he could go off in morning clothes and dine with Lady Sarah at a certain restaurant in the Via della Croce, where the food was excellent though the floor was sanded, and where an old waiter, with the manners of an affectionate ambassador, dealt tenderly with every whim.

On his first evening in Rome he invited Lady Sarah to dine with him at the Grand.

She was not specially fond of Rome's two smart hotels, the Grand and the Excelsior, but, nevertheless, she was not averse from having now and then what she called 'a peep at the twentieth century,' and as this particular peep was to be shared by her brother-in-law, she felt certain she would enjoy it.

''Would you believe it, Sarah, if I told you I feel almost nervous?' said Doctor Ides, as they sat down at their table against the wall. 'Fifteen years since I was here, you

know. And even perpetual glaring down humanity's throats hasn't quite killed the romance in me.'

He unfolded his napkin. As he did so the band struck up a cake-walk. He wrinkled his forehead.

'I 'm a little afraid,' he confessed.

He looked round over the throng of diners.

'No one I know, except—is that Princess Mancelli? Yes, it must be, and still very attractive. Her eyes are unmistakable.'

'In that curious red gown! Yes, it is she. If you 're afraid of Rome, Mervyn, you ought to do as I do.'

'What is that?'

'Live chiefly in the by-ways. I very seldom come here.'

'Too much cake-walk about it?'

'For me. I heard a smart young married English-woman the other day saying to a Roman—"You have come on out here. If you keep it up, in three or four years people will be as ready to come to Rome in spring as they are to go to Monte Carlo."'

'And what was the reply?'

'Madame, croyez moi, nous commençons à peine!'

The doctor sighed.

'Yet you advised me to come.'

'I 'm afraid I was a little bit selfish, Mervyn.'

His face softened.

'And besides Rome can be so many things,' continued Lady Sarah. 'To you and me it will never be Monte Carlo. And we shall not be here when the world becomes one vast casino and factory rolled into one. Rome is adorable still, and glorious, and touching and intimate still. And then there is always the Campagna.'

'Pacci's cabbage patch, as I heard a Yankee once call it. Is Pacci just the same as ever?'

'Just as deep, and just as incoherent—not in mind of course. I met him three days ago.'

'On the Via Collatina? Or under one of the Fede cypresses?'

'In a drawing-room in Palazzo Barberini.'

'Not playing the lion who is roared after?'

'Not playing anything. Drinking his milk and sugar, and musing on Ciriaco d'Ancona, Bhagavad-Gita, and goodness

knows what besides, as he did when you felt pulses and looked at tongues from Porta Pinciana to Monte Savello.'

'Thank heaven I can enjoy Rome in peace now. This is the first time I have ever had a holiday here.'

'That will make it new to you, Mervyn.'

More people came in and made their way to their tables, consciously, while those already seated stared at them in the peculiarly savage way of which only the highly civilised have the secret.

'Do you know many of them?' asked the doctor of Lady Sarah.

She glanced round the big white room.

'A few—and more by sight.'

'Who 's the man sitting next to Princess Manelli?'

'I don't know him, or who he is.'

'He looks as if he had been steadily and powerfully squeezed, until all the kindly juices of humanity had run out of him. And now he is as dry as a *peau de chagrin*.'

'Yes. there is something almost alarming in his appearance.'

At this moment Montebruno, for it was he, slowly turned his strange eyes upon Lady Sarah and the doctor.

'He felt we were speaking of him,' observed the latter. 'He 's evidently preserved something sensitive, one spark perhaps in the midst of the ashes.'

'It 's a terrible face,' said Lady Sarah.

Princess Manelli spoke to Montebruno, who ceased from regarding them.

'Have you noticed, when watching a crowd like this, how the sad faces outnumber the happy ones?' said the doctor.

'I think we see by our own light. If it 's a flickering taper it gives everything rather a ghastly look.'

'And yours, Sally?'

'It 's inclined to flicker, but I try to keep it steady and bright.'

'I 'm sure you do. But I don't know that I quite agree with your definition of human observation. 'A doctor at any fate ought to train himself till he possesses the seeing eye.'

'That perceives what is, you mean, without being influenced by his own temperament and predisposition?

Well, Mervyn, I 'll grant you this: I believe if you and I were obliged to deduce the characters and circumstances of these people about us from their faces you would be right in more cases than I.'

'Well, but—woman's intuition?'

She smiled.

'I would back myself against most men. But you spend your days in summing people up, and I think you were born clear-sighted. My Dick always said so.'

'Dick thought too much of me.'

'I wish he had lived to see your successes.'

The music ceased for a moment, and the peculiar roar—it was more than a hum—of talking humanity seemed suddenly to spread through the restaurant like a percolating tide.

'Here 's a big party coming in!' said the doctor, who was amused by the show, though, as he watched it, he felt very far away from the Rome he had known and loved.

Almost in the middle of the restaurant, and not far from them, was a great oval table decorated with masses of daffodils, among which were concealed electric lights covered with pale yellow silk. A stream of people flowed in towards it, talking and smiling, and nodding to acquaintances as they passed slowly between the tables.

Two or three of them greeted Lady Sarah. They arranged themselves round the daffodils, forming a human chain, it seemed, to imprison the spring, lest it should lightly laugh and evade them.

'Who are they all?' asked the doctor. 'The face of that very tall man seems familiar to me.'

'He 's Sir Theodore Cannynge.'

'To be sure. I attended him once when he was an *attaché* at the British Embassy here. Is his wife there?'

Lady Sarah pointed out Dolores. Doctor Ides looked at her but made no comment. The giver of the dinner was Countess Boccara, who had let her mischievous temperament have its fling. She had gathered together the Cannynges, the Denzils, Cesare Carelli, his mother, Princess Carelli; two striking, but rather startling women who had recently come over to conquer Rome from Monte Video, and who were reported to be richer than the richest heiresses of the United States, but who unluckily were married; three or four

smart young Italian aristocrats of highly inflammatory temperament, especially when exotic good looks were framed in a golden aureole; her husband, and a Scotch woman, whom she thought as absurd as a wild boar, but whose granite-like beauty he professed to admire. And at the last moment—why, perhaps, she herself hardly knew—she had added Giosuè Pacci to her caravansery. She had met him at the Cannynges. Perhaps she thought him different enough from her usual intimates to be *chic* when in their midst, like the touch of black that makes of an ordinary coloured gown a 'creation.'

Why Pacci had accepted her invitation she could not conceive. But in our dreams do we not accept all manner of preposterous propositions?

'Pacci in that *galère*!' murmured Doctor Ides, perceiving the historian who was gazing at the pageant of daffodils with his innocent-looking eyes. 'And this is the *Risorgimento*!'

'If you want to understand it still more completely,' said Lady Sarah, smiling good-humouredly, yet speaking with a touch of satire, 'you should go to-morrow morning to the Sala Pichetti.'

'What happens there, Sally?'

'Princes and senators tumble down. They are all learning to skate on rollers. Later on there are going to be roller skating parties in some of the old palaces.'

'*Autres temps, autres mœurs!*' said the doctor, taking refuge in a platitude. 'Suppress me, Sally, if I become bromide.'

He devoted himself to his dinner.

After a moment he said:

'The daffodil party interests me.'

'Does it? Just now you spoke of seeing many sad faces in such places at this. Can you pick me out the two faces of perfectly happy people in the daffodil party. There are two?'

'Perfectly happy?' said Doctor Ides, with a gentle incredulity.

'It seems impossible. And yet I really believe I am not exaggerating.'

Doctor Ides looked slowly round the circle of talking people.

'Pacci perhaps is Number One.'

'Oh, Pacci! I had forgotten him. He may be perfectly happy, but I cannot judge of him. He is too evasive for me.'

'There are two others!'

After a minute or two he said:

'That lady in green and white, perhaps?'

'Yes, she is one. Edna Denzil, is her name. Now—the other?'

There was a long pause. Then Doctor Ides said:

'I cannot find him.'

'How do you know it is a man?'

'Because it is obviously not any one of the women.'

'And the little lady in yellow?' said Lady Sarah, indicating Countess Bonaria.

'No woman can be perfectly happy with such a waist. It's physiologically impossible. Which man is it? One of those Italian youths, no doubt. But which?'

'It is that man with the big forehead,' said Lady Sarah, drawing her brother-in-law's attention to Francis Denzil.

Doctor Ides looked steadily at Denzil.

'Are you astonished?' asked Lady Sarah at length.

'Who is he?'

'The husband of the perfectly happy woman.'

'Hm!'

The doctor continued to look at Denzil fixedly. Apparently the happy man interested him. As he did not speak Lady Sarah went on talking, and gave him a brief but very sympathetic sketch of the Denzil *ménage*.

'And now, to crown everything,' she concluded, 'he is going to Munich as Minister. It was made public yesterday. And he is only about forty.'

Again there was a silence. Then Doctor Ides said:

'Why does he put his lips so close to the faces of the women on each side of him? They surely can't both be deaf.'

'Oh no. That is only because he's had a bad cold. It has almost taken away his voice.'

The doctor withdrew his eyes from Denzil and fixed them upon his sister-in-law.

'Colds are going about in Rome this year,' she added.

'Ah!' said the doctor.

'What is the matter, Mervyn?'

'Nothing, Sally.'

He paused, then, as if speaking with a slight effort, and not quite naturally, he continued:

'It was always so. When the spring comes in Rome greets her with a sneeze. That sneeze at least is not banished amid all the changes. What do you think of this *plat*? I ordered it specially. Can you guess what it has in it?'

'There seems a suggestion—it is as if a fairy oyster had glided by when it was being cooked.'

'And had been persuaded to join the company of ingredients. You might have been an epicure, Sally. You have a sensitive palate.'

The doctor kept up the conversation, but it had ceased to be quite intimate, quite easy-going. Lady Sarah wondered why the sight of Francis Denzil had affected her brother-in-law's spirits. The two men were not even acquaintances. But perhaps she was astray. Perhaps Denzil had nothing to do with the abrupt depression which she divined beneath the doctor's now rather unusual animation.

When they had finished dinner he said:

'Shall we have coffee in the hall!'

'I never take it. I'm afraid of lying awake at night.'

He looked at her with sympathy.

'I know. The besieging memories. But to-night I must ave it. And we can look at the crowd. I believe I have ne boy in me still. It quite amuses me.'

'Let us go and take up a good position.'

They went out, and sat down at a little table in the hall, on the left just below the steps. The doctor ordered his coffee and lit a cigar.

'This is holiday-making indeed,' he said, leaning back in his deep armchair. 'But I am so unaccustomed to holidays that I haven't quite got into the right frame of mind yet. I don't feel desultory enough.'

'Wait till you've had a day in the Campagna.'

'I'll get a motor, Sally. We'll go to Caprerola, or by Albano and Velletri to beautiful Ninfa, with its tower above the water, and on to Sermoneta. What do you say?'

'I should love it.'

Since they had left the dining-room he had returned to his former manner. Nevertheless Lady Saraff had a conviction that he was on the watch, that his mind was working on a line of thought not connected with what he was saying.

A little woman in a tight mauve gown, and wearing an immense black hat, with a panache of mauve feathers which mounted towards the ceiling, as if desirous of translation, appeared at the top of the steps followed by two stout men, obviously Jews. Very slowly, walking from the hips and looking insolent and dull, she descended and moved, like one in a procession, to a table not far off.

'Grand Marnier!' she observed to one of the men, as if speaking to a slave.

Then sitting down and drawing the tail of her gown around her feet, she became absolutely expressionless and remained silent.

'Difficult to believe there is a soul beneath that hat!' said the doctor. 'Here comes the Mancelli! What a difference!'

'Between the hat and the Grande Dame.'

The Princess passed without seeing them. She was talking to Montebruno and some Russians who belonged to her party. She put up one hand to the velvet strap which covered her white shoulder, and gesticulated with the other, which held a small painted fan.

'How beautifully she walks!' said the doctor. 'After all these years I remember her way of walking. She is a wonderfully attractive woman, though, of course, she has aged. And her expression has changed a good deal, I think.'

'Has it? In what way?'

'It seems to me full of disillusion. She used to look like a conqueror, but a very thorough-bred one.'

Over the bright rose-coloured carpet there was a rustle of trailing gowns. Groups formed about the many tables. Women, sheathed in their clothes, with their hair arranged in heavy masses that looked like caps pulled down over their ears as if to shield them from frost-bite, gazed into the eyes of the men who accompanied them, searching for admiration, comment, the discriminating praise of the ardent masculine stare. Two old men, with white beards, sat down to a game

of écarté in a corner. As they examined their cards, with pursed lips they pushed up their big cigars, looking at the same time wily and morose. An immensely stout German lady, with a topknot of straw-coloured hair that seemed to be trained over a hidden mushroom, uttered a loud 'es ist wirklich ganz wunderschön' to a red-necked man, whose head was the colour of ash, as she threw complacent glances around her. A large group of South Americans, with lustrous, unmeaning eyes, and complexions touched with yellow, looked like perfectly self-possessed exiles as they stared at all these people, whose names even were unknown to them. Then they glanced at their own fine jewels, elaborate gowns, and sparkling rings, and spoke together in Spanish. One of them said, in a low and yet sleepy voice:

'No hay que decir, hijita, mas hermosas son las Chilenas.'

A Persian from the Ministry in the Via Varese looked at her with secretive eyes, as he went by towards the outer hall, walking gently and quickly in his patent leather shoes. Presently a crowd of men, nearly all of them elderly and expressive, some very old and almost tragically thoughtful-looking, appeared at the top of the steps, where they stood for a minute talking together, and glancing down at the butterflies whose bright eyes were turned curiously towards them. A murmur of: 'The Belgian Mission! Mattizelli has been giving a dinner for them!' went through the room, as the grey and white-haired diplomats, courtiers, politicians and littérateurs rather hesitatingly descended and made their way to a great circle of empty chairs arranged round a circle of coffee cups and liqueur glasses. They sat down, perhaps with the intention of discussing great affairs. But the presence of the butterflies evidently distracted them not a little. They looked distrait, and yet intent, almost like boys gazing through the bars of a grille into a garden of Paradise. When they had finished their coffee two or three of them got up vaguely. Others followed their example.

A handsome young under-secretary spoke into the ear of one of them, a very old bald-headed man, who nodded emphatically in response. The secretary took him gently by the arm, led him up to a beautiful Roman and presented him. Then the spell was broken, and the butterflies came into their own. White-haired and wrinkled distinction,

learning, and power devoted themselves to the service of charm, and the two vanities of the intellect and of the epidermis—or was it really of the soul?—softly flattered each other.

'The daffodils are the last to come,' said the doctor.

'Do you care to know any of them, Mervyn?' asked Lady Sarah.

She looked at him with a certain open curiosity. Perhaps it was that look which determined him to say:

'Yes, Sally. If you have an opportunity you might introduce me to the happy man.'

She thought she detected a nuance of almost sad irony in his voice as he spoke the final words.

'Do you mean that you doubt——' she began.

'No, no. But, if you want another bromide, remember the saying, "Call thou no man happy till——"' he broke off. 'Ah! here they come!' he said.

A table close to where they were sitting had been kept for the Countess Boccara's party, which now came down the steps and mingled with groups in the immediate vicinity.

Countess Boccara was in gay spirits. Only that morning her dressmaker had informed her that her waist was still shrinking. Seventeen inches seemed to be almost within her reach and her mischievous dinner had been a success. She knew well that everybody had been talking about her, and it. And the Nunelli had been sitting just opposite to Cesare, who had been placed beside Lady Cannynge. Neither the Princess nor Cesare had shown a trace of embarrassment, but the Countess had a comfortable and thorough knowledge of her sex. She knew very well what '*Cara* Lisetta' must have been feeling. As to Cesare, she was obliged to confess to herself that she did not quite understand him. So far this season he had not made himself conspicuous with Lady Cannynge or with any one else. Since the day of her little dinner for the most beautiful person in Rome she was not aware of any crescendo. And at this moment Cesare was sitting down by one of the sultry-looking women from Monte Video, while Lady Cannynge was talking to the 'old lady who knows Rome.' Countess Boccara acknowledged to herself that the old lady managed to look quite passable, even rather distinguished, in the evening. The mixture of

amber and white in her curiously arranged, or disarranged, hair was certainly novel and effective. But why should Dolores Cannynge——?

At this point in the Countess's reflections she was encircled by young men and began to think of herself.

Meanwhile, Lady Sarah had introduced her brother-in-law to the Cannynges and the Denzils. Sir Theodore remembered him at once, and kept him for a few minutes in a conversation that took them back to 'the old days' of a few years ago. Then Lady Sarah deliberately broke in, and engaged Sir Theodore's attention. Denzil was close to the doctor, and at the moment was speaking to no one. A waiter came up with a pile of cigar boxes on a salver and lifted the lid of the box on the top of the pile, displaying a row of fat yellow-brown Havannas. Denzil stared at them for a moment, then shook his head. The waiter was about to open another box when Denzil said almost in a whisper:

'Pas de cigares!'

'You're not a smoker?' said Doctor Ides.

They were standing. There were two armchairs close to them. As he spoke the doctor sat down and Denzil followed his example, while the waiter went off, gliding with a practised agility among the multitudes of people and tables.

In some hidden place near the top of the steps a newly arrived Hungarian orchestra began to play. One violin soared above the rest, delivering with passionate sentiment a melody that suggested a nature ravaged by love. Many heads turned towards the stairs, and many conversations ceased for a moment.

A feminine voice said:

'How delightful! Some one's given Schuzzi a bottle of champagne. He's beginning really to play. Don't you feel how it goes to the spine?'

'I'm afraid I generally smoke too much,' Denzil said, in reply to the doctor's question.

He pressed his feet on the carpet and moved his chair close to the doctor's.

'You must forgive my croaking. I've caught a cold and it's settled in my throat.'

'A nuisance!'

'Yes.'

He leaned to the doctor to make himself heard.

'I shall get off to Frascati for a change in three days. It 's extraordinary air up there. It ought to blow all this hoarseness away. I should go to-morrow, but my little son has his birthday on Thursday, and we are going to have festivities.'

He smiled, losing his fixed look.

'How old is he?'

'On Thursday he will be nine.'

'At that period of life birthdays are almost terrific occasions. You haven't seen a doctor for your cold?'

'Oh no. It wasn't worth while.'

'You hate fis probably. Is that it?'

'I have no reason to hate doctors.'

'Perhaps you know very little about us!'

'I must confess I've been lucky so far. Since I was a brat I've never known what it was to feel an ache or pain. By Jove, I wish I could have a cigar.'

The waiter with the pile of boxes was again passing not far off.

'Doctor,' Denzil added huskily, 'will you allow me to call you in?'

The waiter stopped before a party of Americans.

'As a throat specialist or as a general practitioner?' asked Doctor Ides.

'A throat specialist. Are you one?'

'To be sure.'

'All the better then. Won't you give me permission to smoke to-night? If you do, my dragon of a wife can't say a word.'

'You can have a cigar.'

'Capital!'

Denzil held up his hand to summon the waiter.

'But on one condition,' added the doctor.

'What is it?'

'That you let me examine your throat and prescribe for you to-morrow morning. I've come out here for a holiday. But I may be able to do something for you—possibly.'

Denzil turned slightly in his chair, and looked very hard at the doctor.

'It 's very kind of you to bother about me,' he said,

almost in a whisper. 'My throat seems to be quite giving out to-night.'

'Come to the hotel at half-past ten to-morrow, and I'll have a look at you.'

'I will, if you really think

'And oblige me by not telling any one you are coming to see me professionally, not even your wife. You see with all this crowd in Rome there may be some others who are hoarse. My name is pretty well known as a throat doctor among Americans as well as English. And I'm here to take a holiday, as I told you.'

'I won't say a word. It's very good of you.

'Not at all. Now enjoy your cigar.'

'I really believe Schizzi must have had two bottles of champagne,' said the female voice which had spoken of the effect of Hungarian music upon the human spine. 'I never heard him play with such meaning before. It's too lovely and affecting. It makes one want I don't know what!'

Cesare's black eyes turned from the phenomena from Monte Video and fixed themselves on Dolores. Denzil looked straight before him. The glance of the doctor travelled from the happy man to his wife, the perfectly happy woman. In the distance, athwart the crowd of chattering and laughing people, Princess Mancelli, who had turned her head, as if carelessly watching the pageant about which she was lightly talking to a member of the Belgian Mission, saw the man who had been her lover gazing at Lady Cannynge. Monterum, slowly moving his blood-shot eyes, looked from one woman to another, with his strange and unchanging melancholy.

Edna Denzil watched her Franzi. She saw the cigar. But she was not shocked. She thought: 'Dear old Franzi! Let him have his little pleasure to-night.'

And Schizzi, inspired perhaps by champagne, played on. He had come out from his hiding-place now, and he stood near the top of the steps leaning towards the little world just below him. With the wand of his music he touched it. And some of its dreams, that till then had been as the mist that drifts over dew, trembled into a fragile being. And some of its hopes awoke, and some of its bitter regrets, and some of its mysterious apprehensions, and some of its

definite fears. Behind many of the masks could be seen for a moment, like a shadow, a face that was surely the face of truth, in many of the eyes a light that was surely a reflection of a marvellous light at a distance.

Giosuè Raeli looked round him slowly, and murmured to himself the words of Leonardo da Vinci:

'Piu è grande la sensibilità, piu è forte il dolore. Grande Martire! Grande Martire!'

CHAPTER XI

THE next morning, without saying a word to his wife, Denzil went to the Grand Hotel and asked for Doctor Meryyn Ides. It was half-past ten, and he was shown up at once into the doctor's sitting-room, which was flooded with sunshine, and gay with flowers arranged by Lady Sarah, who was happy to have some one to look after and think about. As Denzil entered at one door Doctor Ides came in from his bedroom by another, smiling.

'You are a punctual man,' he said, holding out his hand. 'Now let me have a look at your throat and see if I can get rid of this hoarseness.'

'If you can banish it, or diminish it by Thursday,' Denzil almost whispered, 'I shall be very grateful to you. I want to be up to the mark on my boy's birthday.'

'Thursday! To be sure! Sit down in this chair, will you?'

The doctor went to close the window.

Meanwhile in a certain flat in the Via Venti Settembre excitement was rising in a crescendo such as might have satisfied even the Countess Boccara. The day after to-morrow Theo was to be nine! This fact, and the circumstances which were to glorify it, obsessed the three children. They thought of, spoke of, lived for, nothing else. Theo was full of the legitimate pride of one who by length of days is entitled to tribute. His little sisters' souls danced with

proud pleasure in the generous power of giving! In two days Theo was to sit in a special chair, dressed in a new and very grown-up suit, and to be reverently approached by his father and mother, Marianna, Concetta, and themselves—a tribe of paced carriers. In fancy they already beheld his astonished delight at the results of their cogitations, and long and secret perambulations of the Rome that is occupied by shops. The time lagged, yet not a moment was without its thrill. In the most deadly mystery, and with elaborate precautions, parcels were tied up only to be untied. Iris inflexibly kept the kitchen door while Viola was initiated into the rites connected with the preparation of a birthday cake. Then the tiny Viola, with a puny attempt at warrior-like fierceness, stood on guard, yet heroically flanked by Marianna, while Iris stirred a mess which Concetta, the cook, faithfully promised, on the head of her mammina, a lady with a heavy moustache, who kept a species of wine-shop in Trastevere, would eventually stand firm wrapped in a mantle of glittering sugar. Theo was a happy, yet at moments envious exile, perpetually being put out of rooms, and firmly excluded from participation in extraordinary proceedings closely connected with himself. He was 'not to see,' he was to turn his head 'the other way.' If he emerged unexpectedly into the passage he was greeted with shrieks of protest, and a dropping of objects the nature of which he strove to determine by the sound of their impact with the floor. If he went innocently towards a corner a cry of 'you mustn't go there, Theo!' warned him of presences whose identity only Thursday must reveal to him. He suffered delicious pangs.

Fortunately he had matters of the gravest importance on hand himself, which left him but little time to concentrate on his martyrdom. He was preparing a surprise for his father, with the careful assistance of his mother as coach.

Mrs. Denzil was not fond of 'showing off' her children, but she believed in developing any budding talents little human beings displayed. Theo, at this time, gave evidence of a dramatic instinct unusual in a child of his age. He had a good memory, and enjoyed learning bits of Shakespeare and short poems by heart, and was not ashamed to repeat them with a boyish attempt at giving them what he sup-

posed to be their real emotional value. Till now his hearers had been fit but few—his mother, sisters, Marianna, and once or twice Signor Caroi, an Italian teacher who gave him lessons in rudimentary Latin.

Denzil had heard of these efforts, with a smile. But Edna, who believed in an aim, had held in check the perhaps faint curiosity of her husband, with a reiterated 'some day when Theo 's come on more!' And this same 'some day' had been put before Theo as a goal to be won by effort. Now it had been secretly settled between Theo and his mother that the goal should be won on his birthday, and the two pieces chosen for the great occasion were being anxiously prepared behind closed doors. One was the speech by the King at the beginning of the third act of Shakespeare's *King Henry the Fifth*: 'Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more'; the other Tennyson's 'Crossing the Bar,' which was one of Edna's favourite poems. These were not to be repeated in the evening, when there was to be a party of the children's friends, but in the intimacy of the family circle after the present-giving, before the cutting of the birthday cake.

So Theo studied as if his life depended upon it, and had his important reason for keeping people out of rooms and telling them not to listen. The Shakespeare he had taken to with all his soul. Although he was so courteous and considerate of others, anything fiery and pugnacious woke up in him something responsive, that set his blood leaping and lit up his brown eyes. But the Tennyson had at first knocked at his door and had but a feeble answer.

On the morning when Denzil visited Doctor Ides, Edna and little Theo were closeted together. The Shakespeare speech was delivered with intense earnestness, and passed with a 'Capital! Father will be surprised!' But when 'Crossing the Bar' had been spoken Edna sat for a minute in silence. She thought that perhaps she had made a mistake in choosing it for a boy of nine to recite. She had yielded to her own preference without thinking enough of Theo. Patriotism roused up the male in her son, but death perhaps only confused him. For a moment she rebuked herself, and considered whether it would not perhaps be best to be content with the Shakespeare and to let the Tennyson go.

'What 's the matter, mums? Don't I do it right?' said Theo anxiously.

His mother looked up at him.

'Not so well as the other.'

'Let me try again.' He clenched his hands, and his lower jaw trembled slightly. 'I *will* get it, but it is difficult.'

'I expect you don't quite understand it.'

The question rising in her mind was, 'Do I wish him to understand it?'

'Wait a moment, Theo!' she added.

He stood, gazing at her with his bright and eager eyes, full of confidence in her power and will to help him. After a pause she continued:

'It 's like this. When we are small we want a lot of help from people. Viola is smaller than you, and wants more help than you do.'

'I should rather think she does, mums!' Theo interpolated, with a conviction that sounded almost injured.

'But however big and however old we get we always need help, every one of us. I do, father does, for instance.'

'Does father?'

'Yes. We need the pilot. Ships, you know, must have a pilot to bring them safe into port, some one who understands the currents, the channel, where the sandbanks are, and where there 's deep, good water that will take the ship safely. We all make a voyage through life. But that isn't everything. When we grow old certainly, and it may be long before that, we have to make another voyage. We don't live down here for ever.'

'I see!' interjected Theo gravely.

'And when the moment comes to start—well, we do want a helping hand then, most awfully.'

'I should think so!' said Theo, still with solemnity but without any fear.

'We can't take any one or anything with us. We just have to nip off alone. But across the bar there 'll be some one to look after us, take charge of us, guide us across the water to the port we 're bound for. You know who that is?'

'Is it God?'

'That 's what we believe, and that 's what Tennyson believed when he wrote this piece. He was an old man

then, but you see he wanted the helping hand, just as I should, or father would, if we had to be off.'

Theo stood in silence for a minute. Then he said:

'I say, mums!'

'Well?'

'I do jolly well hope none of us 'll have to go for ever so long.'

'So do I!'

Mrs. Denzil was not highly imaginative, she was very happy and she spoke quite seriously, even earnestly; but she was governed by a feeling, unreasonable enough yet very prevalent in the ranks of the happy, a feeling that things must last as they were with her. As the miserable and unfortunate feel dedicated to distress, so do the joyous feel dedicated to joy. Edna Denzil was conscious of a warm sensation of safety, and of trust in the Great Someone outside, beyond, who had the power to surround her with blessed security.

'Now, Theo, old boy, try again!' she added. 'And think of what we've been talking about, that even a man like father becomes almost as little Viola in the moment of crossing the bar. Think of what he needs, and what he believes he will have.'

'It says "I know," mums!' observed Theo, with a questioning look in his eyes.

'What he knows he will have,' his mother corrected herself.

And Theo tried again and did very much better.

In the Denzil household they lunched at half-past twelve; but that day, when the half-hour struck, Denzil had not returned. Edna waited ten minutes, wondering a little what had become of her husband. She was just getting up to go alone into the dining-room, supposing that he must have been detained by some sudden business at the Embassy when there was a ring at the bell. In a moment Beppo, the manservant, came in with a note. It was from Denzil.

DEAREST ED,—I shan't be back for lunch—kept by some business. I 'm sorry I couldn't let you know sooner. Blessings on you and the brats. YR FRANZL'

Edna held this note very close to her face, then took it away and looked at Beppo, who stood near the door, with a calmly serious expression on his rather large and much-shaved countenance.

'Who brought it, Beppo?'

'Carlino, Signora.'

Carlino was a page in Sir Theodore's service.

'Davvero! You can bring in lunch.'

Again she held the note near to her eyes.

'How awfully illegible dear old Franzi is getting,' she thought, as she examined his 'blessings on you and the brats.'

Beppo left the room, with his sharp turn on the heels and slightly strutting gait, but she did not follow him immediately. She knew not why but, as she gazed at her husband's downward tending scrawl, and smudgy signature, a peculiar and almost fierce tenderness filled her heart. Suddenly her imagination awoke, and the meaning of possession and the meaning of loss sprang up quivering in her mind. Her conversation with little Theo came to her memory and her comfortable 'So do I!' in response to his boyish expression of hope. How sluggish she had been then! Franzi and the brats! What would life be without them? What would she be if they were to cross the bar before her, without her?

'Lunch is ready, signora,' observed Beppo, putting in his head.

Edna Denzil started.

'I'm coming.'

She went slowly to the dining-room carrying her husband's scrawl in her hand. And she dropped it up against a pepper-pot and looked at it while she ate.

That morning Sir Theodore went out riding with the French Ambassador and saw some flying at Centocelle. The weather was brilliant, the horses were in great spirits. A good gallop, and the sight of a man winging his way towards the Alban mountains, while the swarthy *carrettieri dei Castelli* in the wine carts stared from their hooded rooms with half-contemptuous, half-indignant eyes, then lay down to sleep again on their cloaks and their sacks, had put Sir Theodore into unusually good-humour. He was still

young enough, and still healthy enough, to know the sheer joy of the body, just now and then in a favourable hour, to be dominated by it, and to snap his fingers at the melancholy claims of the mind and the soul. Such an hour he had just had in the Campagna, and as he walked lightly to his library he hummed the delicious tune of a Viennese waltz, without thinking, as so often, 'It lost Vienna.' Feeling pleasantly inclined for a few minutes of rest, he sat down in a big chair, stretched out his hand, and laid hold of the nearest book. It chanced to be Tolstoy's *Cossacks*, and he opened it at the chapter where Uncle Jeroshka takes Olyenin for his first hunting expedition in the forest of the Caucasus. As he read he seemed to see the dew lying on the herbage, to smell the low-lying smoke from the chimneys of the village, to hear the bark of the eager dog, and the hunter's invocation, 'To the father and the son!' as the gun was lifted to the shoulder and the finger found the trigger. And again an unusually vital sense of the *joie de vivre* beset him. It was almost as if a wind from some desert place, or some rolling ocean, blew on his face, calling him from meditation, and books, and the absurdities of society, to a life stinging with blood and strong with action.

A knock on the door recalled him.

'Avanti!' he said.

Carlino, the page, entered. He was a very small boy, with a close-cropped head, sensitive features, and honest, but rather anxious dark eyes. Standing by the door he said:

'Il Signor Denzili!'

'Signor Denzil?'

'Sissignore.'

'Bring him at once, Carlino.

'Sissignore.'

'What an anxious expression that little chap has!' thought Sir Theodore, not for the first time, as Carlino disappeared.

In a moment he returned with Denzil coming slowly behind him.

'Good morning, Francis. Stop to lunch, won't you? It's nearly time.'

Denzil gave his hand and gripped Sir Theodore's, and

there was a sort of fierceness in his grasp which almost startled his friend.

'If I stay I must write a note to Ed.'

'Of course. Carlino will take it. Write it here.'

Carlino remained by the door, gazing at Signor Denzili, while Denzil let himself down into the revolving chair in front of the writing-table.

'Francis, my boy, your voice is shocking this morning,' added Sir Theodore. 'You really must be treated and knock off all smoking for a time. I agree with Edna, and I shan't tempt you any more.'

'No,' said Denzil, huskily.

He leaned his left temple against his left hand, took a pen, and drew a sheet of notepaper towards him. Then he stared at his friend, and added, almost in a whisper:

'I'm going to be treated.'

Bending very low over the table he began to write. He changed the position of his left hand, holding the fingers tightly against his forehead and the thumb outstretched against his cheek. The fingers made for the moment a sort of penthouse shield above his eyes. Sir Theodore looked at him narrowly, then looked away.

'Is there anything up with Francis?' he thought.

His mind went to the Munich appointment. Surely nothing could have gone wrong in connection with that. He dismissed the idea as absurd. Probably there had been some business at the Embassy which had wearied Francis, or worried him. Lunch, a talk, a—no, not a smoke!—would put him right.

Denzil thrust his note unevenly into an envelope, tried to close it, failed; then with an odd deliberation took the paper out, smoothed it with care, adjusted it neatly in the envelope, shut, addressed, and held the envelope out to Carlino, who approached with staring eyes to receive it. As soon as he had gone out Denzil, leaning forward in his chair against the writing-table, with his arms lying upon it, turned his head towards Sir Theodore, and said:

'Theo, come here, will you!'

Sir Theodore came.

'What is it? What's up with you, Francis?'

'Sit down.'

Sir Theodore sat down in a chair beside his friend. Denzil leaned forward for a moment, staring down at the blotting-pad across which his arms were laid.

'What the deuce can be the matter?' thought Sir Theodore.

An unpleasant conviction that it was something serious, desperately serious, took hold on him. Denzil looked up.

'Theo, I've come here to tell you something.'

Again he stared down at the blotting-paper, on which was the pattern of his note to his wife.

'Yes?'

'Ed is not to know—till after Thursday.'

'What is it? Nothing bad, I hope?'

Sir Theodore drew his chair closer to his friend.

'It's pretty bad—for me, and Ed, and the—my—the brats.'

Sir Theodore laid a hand on Den

'What is it, Francis?'

Denzil put up his hand and took hold of his throat, and kept his hand there.

'Something seriously wrong there, Francis?'

Denzil nodded.

'Good God! But—not—not the worst?'

'The worst,' whispered Denzil.

Sir Theodore sprang up and turned away.

'No, no!' he muttered. 'No, no! I'm not going to believe that!'

He went towards the window, stood still for a moment, and came back.

'How can you know?' he asked, with an odd roughness in his manner, and an almost threatening sound in his deep voice.

'Ides!' said Denzil.

'Mervyn Ides?'

Sir Theodore felt something cold run through him, almost like a quick trickle of icy water.

'You've been to Mervyn Ides? This morning?'

'Yes.'

'He examined you?'

'Yes. It's—cancer of the larynx.'

There was a long silence. Sir Theodore broke it by saying:

'What is Ides going to do?'

'Operate—Friday morning.'

Again the silence fell. At length Denzil said:

'Ed's not to know till Thursday's over.'

'Why?'

'Theo's birthday.'

'Oh, Francis—Francis!'

Sir Theodore's face worked.

'But you can't—it's impossible! No, Francis—no!'

'One last day with the brats happy.'

'Oh, Francis, old chap!'

Sir Theodore put one arm almost awkwardly round his friend's shoulder, took it swiftly away and went out of the room. As he shut the door he came upon Dolores. She had just returned from a walk with Lady Sarah on the Pincio.

'Doloretta!' he exclaimed.

'Theo!' she gazed into his face. 'Oh, Theo! What is it?'

He made an effort so painful that it seemed to drive the blood away from his heart.

'Nothing. Been walking?'

'With Lady Sarah.'

'I've had a gallop. Savoia was flying. Old Leonardo ought to have been there to see him—right away to the Alban mountains.'

He turned and went back into the library.

'Francis,' he said. 'May Doloretta know?'

'Before Ed?'

'He'll save you. Ides will save you. He's the best man there is. You've long years before you.'

'Without a larynx?'

'But—the operation is for complete removal?'

'I don't know yet.'

Sir Theodore sat heavily down.

Outside in the distance a Japanese gong sounded delicately

'What are we going to do?' said Sir Theodore.

The gong meant that lunch was ready. Dolores would be waiting. At any moment she might come into the room with a 'Theo, aren't you coming?'

'I'll have lunch,' whispered Denzil, getting up from the writing-table.

'With us? With Doloretta?'

'It's the only thing. To keep on, stick to the everyday matters, catch hold of all I can.'

'Of me,' said Sir Theodore.

He drew Denzil's arm through his and they left the room together.

'Doloretta will guess there is something,' Sir Theodore said in a low, uneven voice, as they stood in the next room.

'Tell her my throat's a bit sore then. Afterwards—we'll talk about Friday—I must consult you.'

They found Dolores in the further room.

She greeted Denzil with gentle cordiality. She felt for him almost an affection now that she knew he was going away to Munich. No one living rejoiced at his 'step' as she did. But she kept this fact to herself.

'I've been buying a present for little Theo,' she said, as they went into the dining-room.

'Good of you!' said Denzil.

She looked round.

'Your throat!' she said. 'You really must do something for it.'

'I'm going to. It is rather sore. What did you get to spoil Theo with?'

'A whip. Yesterday I saw him proudly on a pony in the Borghese. He's got quite a good seat already. How he'll enjoy himself in the Englische Garten at Munich.'

Sir Theodore frowned.

Dolores changed the conversation. She had not meant to upset her husband. Doubtless he was thinking of the lonely Rome when the Denzils were gone. But though she quickly brought up another topic, her lips tightened for a moment, and an almost hard look came into her face.

But when the Denzils were gone, when they were safely away, she would make Theo forget the hours in the Via Venti Settembre. Somehow she would teach him to forget. She would find the means. Does not love give women almost miraculous resources? She would win him back to her. Once those children and their mother were gone she would reconcile Theo to a charming, intellectual, cultivated life

in which children would not be missed. How many middle aged men there were who were quite contented in such a life! And surely a man can forget in time his dearest desire if only it is not provoked perpetually by the contemplation of another's possession of that which he lacks. Hitherto, as Dolores knew, her efforts had been in vain. The interesting people, the salon, bibelots, pictures, books, horses, hobbies—nothing had been of any avail. But—once the Denzils were gone! Once they were gone! Ah! how swiftly then would she smooth away the frown from Theo's forehead.

She softened again, melted as she caught at this hope with resolute hands. And, irresistibly impelled to be specially cordial to Denzil, she put forth her soft and sweet powers of a very sensitive and feminine woman, quite unselfconsciously, acting indeed impulsively out of the promptings of her heart. When she had unexpectedly met her husband before lunch she had at once seen that something unusual had occurred, throwing him into an unusual condition. Her quick woman's curiosity had been roused. Now she flung it away carelessly, intent on her own breath of life. But the two men were almost startled by her gust of sweetness and even of tenderness. Denzil stared across at his friend. Surely, in that moment of absence, Theo had not given Dolores a hint of his desperate need. And Sir Theodore looked at his wife, wondering whether some intuition of the dreadful truth—which had almost stunned him, and which now made the hours unnatural, like an hour ticked out by a clock in some frightful dream—had turned her heart towards Francis, made him new in her eyes, as men become to sweet women when their powers fail them, and the child in them appears stretching hands for succour to the earthly Providence of their sex.

'Would it be best to get her to tell Ed?'

The thought shot through Denzil's mind.

'One woman to another!'

Instinctively he had rejected Theo's abrupt suggestion to tell Dolores of the tragedy under which he was now striving with a sort of benumbed effort, sickening and lethargic, but persistent, not to bend, cower, sink down. Heats and chills were shooting through his body. His eyelids and

hands tingled at moments, and he felt as if only by an exhausting effort of the will he prevented perspiration from breaking out upon him. In the Grand Hotel he had received the truth with a calm which had amazed himself, though not Doctor Ides. When things had been talked over between him and the doctor he had got away with a quiet that was like serenity. In the hall of the hotel he had met two ladies whom he knew, and one of his own colleagues. He had been able to speak to them, to smile at some joke. He had said a word to the hall porter. As he went away he had looked at the fountain, the beggars lounging beside it, a yellow motor passing driven by a young red-haired man with a monocle.

'Well, here it is!' something like that he had said to himself, as he crossed the road, hearing the diminishing hoot of the yellow motor. 'Here it is shut close in my throat what thousands of men and women quail at the very thought of! The mystery to solve which multitudes of scientific men are giving all the working hours of their lives! The horror which has cost the existences of animals innumerable—uselessly! I carry it along with me now as I walk, part of me, just up here, close to the air and the sun and that blue. And none of these people know. And though I know, here I am walking as strongly as usual, feeling no sharp pain, just a bit hoarse and voiceless, but able to do my work, to be about, to look exactly as usual. There goes that Russian chap, Karovsky! gives me his usual smiling wag of the head, like a jolly child. If he had time he 'd come up and talk to me about Gorki, and never know. Say, "Je vous ai dit que vous fumez trop," and then more Gorki. Every instant I pass people. Lots of them look at me. But not one knows. Not one even suspects what I am, what I am carrying along with me.'

He had even been conscious of a faint sensation of irony that was not unpleasant to him when he saw a dandified Italian youth stare at his tie, in which was a curious old paste pin given to him by Edna.

'Does he think he can see it?' he had thought.

And at that moment he had felt as if a dreadful smile had slipped over his face. Surely a sort of still madness had taken him just at first. It was like lunacy to feel so calm,

to be able to think of other people's, strangers', feelings in such a moment, to find amusement even in the thought of their ignorance of the thing he knew. He had descended the hill which leads to the Palazzo Barberini quite comfortably, enjoying the warmth of the sun on his back. But when he had entered the palace, when he had seen Carlino at the well-known door, when he had heard Sir Theodore's 'Stop to lunch, won't you?' above all when he had written the note to his wife, 'It' had begun to stand over him. So it seemed to him. He was down in a pit and It was towering above him. With every moment now It seemed to grow, enveloping everything about him. Theo, his old and tried friend, was in its shadow and utterly changed. Dolores, too, was different. He heard all that she said, knew exactly what it meant, was able to answer and break in huskily, was conscious of her animation, and peculiarly, warmly kind manner. And yet she seemed at moments to be a gabbling and shrieking monkey, with eyes and paws intent on his throat. He began to wonder, with a coldness of the innermost fear, whether he was going to play the coward. Never had he thought to do that. All his traditions were against that. Even Edna surely would disown him if he 'funked.' He—the real he hidden somewhere within him, like a red spark in a mass of black peat—would disown himself. Nevertheless he felt as if something was beginning to shiver within him, to open lips in order to let out shrieks of protest, to search violently for a way of escape, to clamour for safety, careless of the eyes or ears of any one living. He wanted to strike that thing down at once. Its destruction was a necessity. But he felt its strength, its power, its recklessness of opinion, its independence of everything except its growing terror and rebellion. How was he going to dominate it? It was as if he held a dreadful live secret in the cage of his hands, and felt it struggling to get away, to burst its prison, to show itself to every one.

If it did that!

He began to be afraid of his own fear.

'One woman to another!'

He stared at Dolores. Why was she being so almost tenderly kind to him to-day? But, no, he must tell Ed himself, when the moment came.

Sir Theodore scarcely said a word. His understanding of the meaning of what Denzil had just told him was with every moment becoming more terribly complete. In the library he had known little of it. But now—his beautiful room had become frightful to him. Every object his eyes rested upon looked stark, as if it had been stripped of that which had formerly made it attractive, or beautiful, and now appeared in a native dreadfulness, like a skeleton deprived of the flesh that once made it a body; every object, except Dolores.

Couldn't she help?

Almost for the first time in his life, perhaps for the first time, he thought of her for a moment as shelter.

When they got up from lunch he said to her:

'What are you going to do, Dolorietta?'

'Rest a little. And then I meant to practise those things of Ravel's. Do you want me?'

She laid a sort of gentle stress on the last words, and her gazelle-like eyes became full of a melting wistfulness.

'Francis and I have got to have a talk. And then—well, I shall know where to find you.'

'And Francis too,' she said.

Again Denzil stared at her, wondering.

When the two men were in the library again Sir Theodore grasped his friend's hand quickly.

'Francis!' he said. 'I'm beginning to—'

He dropped Denzil's hand.

'Why do such things come upon us?' he exclaimed.

His voice was harsh and bitter.

'Never on you, Theo—let's hope.'

Sir Theodore looked at his friend. He wanted to be able to say, with truth, 'Rather on me than you!' thinking of Denzil's life and his; ambition still to be gratified, perfect home happiness, children, the mother who was the wife—the ended career, the childless hearth. But his soul was saying, 'Rather you than me.' And, even in that moment, he was unable to imagine such a catastrophe occurring to himself.

'Francis—sit down.'

A manservant brought in coffee. When he had gone Denzil said:

'You must come very close to me.'

Sir Theodore came.

'I must try to arrange things, not to forget anything that concerns—them.'

'Ides can do anything. He's marvellous. He can do what no other surgeon can do. He'll save you.'

'Perhaps, at any rate, for a time. I trust him thoroughly. But let me speak about arrangements.'

Sir Theodore marvelled at the apparent serenity of his friend. It seemed to him incredible. Yet there it was. He did not thoroughly realise that Denzil, with a sort of almost dull fixity of purpose, was trying to fasten his mind upon things, to grip subjects with his thoughts, to dodge his demon.

'Give me time! I'll assert myself if only I can gain a little time!'

It was a sort of dumb prayer thrust up to Whatever had set It in his throat.

'I'll be true to myself and tradition—only help me through this bit of time, just this bit I'm in now. I'm hard pressed just now. Give me a hand over this rough piece of ground, and I won't fall. I'll stand and face it.'

'I've made my will, of course. There's not very much to leave—'

And so on, almost in a whisper. And as the whispering continued Sir Theodore began at last fully to grasp the whole meaning of the matter. Francis was—perhaps, he clung on to that perhaps—going to disappear. Edna might soon be a widow, the little ones, the brats, fatherless, and he without his friend. He looked at Francis. The truth seemed incredible. There was no change in Francis's appearance. He did not look ill. Only the whispering sounds betrayed his condition. A wave of intense sympathy went through Sir Theodore, a mere desire to be potent.

'Will you, Theo? Will you look after them—if it comes to that?'

'Can't you see that I will.'

'Yes. You know my ideas about how a boy should be brought up. The little girls——' he stopped. 'Ed knows better than we do all they need. But Theo will want a man to see to him. May I constitute you his guardian in case of the worst?'

'Francis, I——' he looked at the tall windows for a moment. 'Francis, put everything, everything you care to into my hands. My life is pretty empty now. If—well, it may be much emptier presently, though God grant not. Fill it up for me as much as you can with duties that will be of some use and benefit to them. I love them. That's all I need to say.'

'That says everything. That's what I wanted.'

Presently Denzil whispered:

'That seems all, as regards their future.'

There was a long silence between the two friends. At last Sir Theodore broke it by saying:

'You can't keep it to yourself till Thursday is over, you can't.'

'I am going to. Ides knows that, and agrees.'

'You can't do it.'

'Doing it will help me tremendously. It's something to grip on to, live for.'

'But Edna—she must find out. She is so one with you, Francis. And women have an almost mystical knowledge of things sometimes.'

His mind was fixed entirely on Edna Denzil as he said that.

'And the shock to her. She will have no time to prepare. She will lose these days.'

'Lose! Gain them, if I hold out. Two more happy days.'

'But to have to face Friday instantly!'

'I believe it's better. I know she'll forgive me for doing it. Tell her—and all the brats are looking forward to for Thursday must go. I couldn't ask a woman to help through with it, knowing. Even Ed couldn't come up to the scratch. No.'

'I must go and see Ides.'

'I wish you would.'

Sir Theodore cleared his throat raspingly twice, then suddenly cursed himself for having done it. An acute pang of neuralgia seemed to impale his brain.

'Where—where is the operation going to take place?' he got out.

'I don't know yet. There's been no time to think. I daresay Ides——'

'It must take place here,' Sir Theodore said, with sudden decisiveness.

'No, Theo.'

'It must!'

'I couldn't—Dolores! Think of her!'

At that moment the distant sound of a piano was audible. Sir Theodore turned his head and listened for a moment. Dolores was practising an elusive and ultra-modern étude, complicated, difficult, and full of elaborate delicacies. Heard in such a moment, and in the presence of his friend, it produced upon Sir Theodore an effect that surprised himself.

'Dolores!' he said, and his big voice was resonant with feeling. 'It will do her good to look things in the face! You have to go through—that! And can't she endure that it should happen in her apartment? Is she to be afraid of the interruption in our two useless cotton-wool lives? What? Is it such a tragedy to keep the piano silent for a few days, to go quietly, not to receive 'interesting' people and gossip over the tea-cups? I do think of Doloretta, and I say that she and I will help you through, Francis, and help Edna through—she and I!'

In the silence the sound of the piano was again audible in the room. Denzil leaned forward.

'Theo, don't wrong Dolores!' he whispered.

'No, no! Perhaps——' Sir Theodore got up. 'Such a thing as this casts a man loose from his moorings.'

Denzil got up too.

'You're not going, Francis?'

'Yes.'

'Where to?'

'Home.'

Sir Theodore gazed at him.

'You're ready to face Edna?'

'I think so. I must begin on something. I can't——'

'I know. I know. But—if Ides consents to the operation taking place here I must have your permission to tell Doloretta.'

'Before Ed knows? That is another reason against its taking place here.'

'It can't be done in your flat, because of the children.'

'I think the Anglo-American Hospital——'

'Francis, if Ides consents, let us give you a home to go through it in. It 's bad enough. With us—here—at least you'll feel, and Edna will feel, you 're with those who care. I have a horror of nursing-homes. And we have so much useless space.'

He stopped.

'Ides shall decide,' he added.

'Yes, Ides will know best. But—anyhow—thank you, old fellow. I shan't forget all that . . .'

He broke off. Like a stab there seemed driven into him the thought:

'How much longer shall I be able to remember anything?'

'Shall we see Doloretta for a moment? or would you rather not?'

Denzil hesitated.

'I should like to say good-bye to her.'

'And then shall I walk back with you?'

'I think I must go alone. I . . . I want to get ready.'

'I know, I know.'

A crushing sense of human impotence came down on Sir Theodore.

'If I could help!' he thought.

For an instant he felt like a man suddenly deprived of his arms, and beset by the instinctive desire to stretch them out to one in sore need of affection. And again he said to himself:

'Couldn't Doloretta help?'

'Come, Francis!' he said.

Gently he took Denzil by the arm and led him out of the room. How strange, how almost terrible, because unnatural, it seemed that Denzil walked with his usual firmness of a strong and athletic man!

CHAPTER XII

DENZIL only stayed two or three minutes with Dolores, who stopped her practising, and sat on the music seat with

one hand resting on the keys while she talked to him. Just as he was going away she said :

'I had a note from Edna. Do you really wish me to come to the first ceremony on Thursday? Of course, Theo 's a godfather. That is different. I 'm going to look in on the children in the evening. But Edna has invited me to the present-giving too.'

'Oh, do come and present the whip,' said Denzil in a whisper.

Those were his last words to Dolores. Sir Theodore went to let his friend out. When he came back Dolores was still at the piano, but she was not playing. Directly her husband was in the room she said :

'Theo, what is the matter with Francis?'

''The matter!' said Sir Theodore, startled.

''Yes. I don't mean his cold. But perhaps I am indiscreet to ask. Never mind.'

She arranged the music on the piano-stand, turning back some leaves.

'This Ravel is fearfully difficult. Most of these modern composers are. And even when one has mastered their works, I don't know—the result often seems unsatisfactory.'

'Ils allumaient bien leur petite lanterne,' quoted Sir Theodore, trying to seem interested and to smile. 'Seulement c'était comme celle des vers luisants. "Elle ne réchauffait rien et éclairait à peine." Rolland is not far from the mark.'

'No, perhaps not.'

He stood by the piano, looking down on her from his great height. He was dreading the moment when she would begin to play again. Music, any music, at that moment would be like an outrage in the room Denzil had just left. Dolores could not know that, yet she evidently hesitated to begin playing. As her husband said nothing more, however, she lifted her hands, and was just going to strike the keys when he bent suddenly and took them in his.

'Don't play any more to-day, Doloretta!'

'Of course not if you don't wish it.'

'Just for to-day.'

'There 's nothing wrong with the children?'

'No.'

Something in her eyes, and perhaps something in his heart, made him long to be sincere with Dolores at this moment.

'But there is something,' he said. 'I want to tell you what it is. But it is not my secret.'

'I see. I'm afraid it's very sad. But I don't wish to know it.'

He let go of her hands, and she gently shut up the piano, and put away the music. This done, she hesitated. She did not know what she was going to do since she was not going to practise.

'Have you anything to do this afternoon, Theo?' she asked.

'Yes. I'm going to see Doctor Ides.'

'Lady Sarah's brother-in-law!'

'I knew him ages ago when he was practising here and I was a Secretary of Embassy. He's an interesting fellow. We must get him here while he's in Rome.'

He saw by her eyes that she had immediately connected Doctor Ides with the thing he had not told her, and he felt as if it was his strong desire to tell it to her which made her so almost uncannily intelligent at that moment.

'Yes. I should like to know him. Well, I will write some letters.'

She went slowly to the writing-table, sat down, took a pen, and began to write. Sir Theodore looked for a moment at the delicate line of her long neck, with the soft dark hair against its whiteness, and at her beautiful little head bent over the writing-table. She at least was not suffering, was not doomed. What it must be to stand by and watch a gentle woman suffer horribly!

And then suddenly Edna Denzil rose up before him. And her face was happy. Never had he seen her look unhappy. What was before them all? Like Denzil he felt that he must get a grip on the things of the day, concentrate himself on the moment. Ides! He must go and see Ides.

He went out of the room without speaking again to Dolores, and the last sound that he heard before he shut the door was the slow scratching of her pen on the notepaper she was covering.

Doctor Ides was in the hotel. Through the glass door

Sir Theodore saw him sitting alone reading the *Times* in a quiet corner of the big hall in which Schizzi had played. He was wearing gold-rimmed eyeglasses, and his fresh-coloured, clean-shaven face looked very serious, and rather impassive as he read. But Sir Theodore's eyes fixed themselves on his hands. They were both holding the paper, large, well-shaped, powerful, and yet delicate-looking hands, pink in colour, with oval finger-tips. Would they be able to save Francis?

Doctor Ides looked up suddenly over his eyeglasses, wrinkling his high forehead and slightly turning his head without moving his body. He laid down the *Times* when he saw Sir Theodore.

'Denzil 's been with me, Doctor Ides.'

Sir Theodore felt the touch of the doctor's hand, dry, cool, surely restorative. The doctor drew up an armchair deliberately for his visitor.

'I knew he was going to tell you,' he said, in his quiet, almost lazy voice.

He took off his eyeglasses and laid them down on the *Times*.

'It 's a bad business?'

'Very bad. I was afraid, when I met him last night after dinner.'

'But surely hoarseness——'

'It wasn't that only.'

'And to me he looks so well and strong. It seems almost incredible.'

'Yes, yes. I shall do all that can be done.'

'Have you—is there a good hope of saving him? He 's got a wife, little children. He 's just been appointed to Munich.'

'I doubt very much whether he 'll be able to take up that appointment.'

'But——'

'I hope to save his life.'

'Isn't there a great danger of pneumonia after such an operation?'

'Not to my patients.'

'But shock to the system?'

'Any shock to the system will not depend on the

opening of the larynx, but on the manipulations required in it.'

'And—excision?'

'It may be necessary. I'm speaking to you with absolute frankness, as I did to him. In my long experience I have found that with most patients perfect sincerity is the wisest policy, even speaking medically. It creates that splendid bond between doctor and patient, trust. There may be cases where one must hold back the truth. Mr. Denzil's is not one of them.'

'You are right. But about his poor wife?'

'We talked that over. I offered to go home with him to her and to help through with the telling. But he is set upon having certain birthday festivities first.'

'Is it right? Is it fair to her?'

Doctor Ides lifted his eyeglasses, held them between two of his fingers for a moment, laid them down again.

'She gains—perhaps—a couple of days of happiness.'

'Perhaps?'

'Many women are not easy to deceive, some cannot be deceived.'

'But is it right even to try?'

'My position was this. I was obliged to pronounce a terrible verdict. He took it, as so many do, with what seemed almost inhuman calmness. But he claimed two days. In his condition, from my point of view, there is little reason why he should not have them. I explained matters medically. He stuck to those two days. I did not consider it within my province to enter into his domestic relations. I said so. And there it ended.'

'It would have to end there, of course. But I know his wife so well.'

Sir Theodore studied the carpet for a minute or two. Then, leaving that subject, he broached his plan that the operation should take place in the Palazzo Barberini.

'If—which God forbid—he has to die, let it be in the home of those who care for him at least,' he said. 'I know all the advantages of hospitals and nursing-homes. Everything ready, everything foreseen and arranged for. There is the Anglo-American Hospital here. I've been over it. It's splendidly managed. But—well, Doctor Ides, this is a

matter of sentiment with me. I 'm not ashamed to confess it. Denzil is my best friend. Let him bring his trouble to me. I will do the best for him I can. I know, of course, the question of expense arises. If he lives he and I will arrange it between us. If he dies—please remember it 's solely my affair. I 'm better off at present than he is. Nurses, everything that can be wanted. You shall come and do what you like in my apartment, tear anything down, turn anything out, strip walls, floors; nothing matters but Francis.'

'Did you mention this idea to him?'

'Yes. Of course he began about a nursing-home. But'—Sir Theodore laid a twitching brown hand on Doctor Ides' sleeve—'I know him, and in his heart he was longing that it should be in my home. His wife too—how she will wish it, when she knows!'

'I should prefer the nursing-home.'

'Do you absolutely veto the other idea?'

After a pause, during which Doctor Ides sat with his blue eyes fixed on Sir Theodore, he said:

'No.'

Impulsively Sir Theodore got up.

'Come and see my apartment and give any directions you like. You are master in it.'

The doctor took up his eyeglasses, and followed Sir Theodore's example. When he had found his soft grey hat, and they were going out through the revolving door, he said:

'Palazzo Barberini, is it?'

'Yes.'

'If it is to be there, keep it absolutely quiet beforehand. You know how fussy people are about everything that happens in a building they inhabit, however immense it is.'

'Of course.'

Abruptly the thought of Dolores came to him. All this time he had not remembered her.

'My wife!' he said. 'She is at home this afternoon. She will have to know.'

'But haven't you talked over your suggestion with her?'

'No. She knows nothing. Denzil lunched with us to-day, but he did not tell her.'

'Well, if the operation is arranged to take place in your

apartment she must be told. Perhaps she will not wish it.'

The doctor sent a glance at his companion.

'She will be ready to do anything that can help Denzil through. She is very fond of him. And already she suspects something. She asked me after lunch what was the matter with him to-day.'

'I daresay we shall have Mrs. Denzil doing that too,' observed Doctor Ides quietly.

'I don't know. I think Francis—Denzil I mean—meant to get himself absolutely in hand. And he 's a strong man.'

'I respect him for the way he took it. But we specialists learn to respect a great many of our patients.'

The doctor sighed.

'That is a compensation for certain disillusions,' he added, as if to cover the sigh.

'I often wonder how a great surgeon can endure his life,' said Sir Theodore. 'Working, as he must, perpetually in the midst of desperate human anxiety.'

'He learns to dismiss his cases from his mind directly his patients are beyond his sight, to shut them out sharply till the time comes to work for them.'

'Can you do that?'

'As a rule, yes. Years ago I found that unless I could manage to do it I should simply have to give up practising as a throat specialist.'

'Do you mean that this afternoon, for instance, you could go, say, for an expedition in the Campagna and enjoy it?'

'I daresay I could. One thing my profession teaches. It teaches a man to face life and death, not only for himself but for others, with cool nerve, with steady eyes.'

He lifted up one hand.

'This hand must never tremble, Sir Theodore. I have to bear that in mind. But the fact that a surgeon must possess complete self-control does not exclude the possibility of his possessing a certain amount'—the doctor put a faintly ironic stress on the last two words—'of human sympathy. I know personally what throat trouble is. I was once thought to be dying of a disease of the throat myself.'

'You!'

'Yes, throat consumption. For nearly a year I was away on the Cotswold Hills and never once spoke.'

'Do you really mean that you did not utter one word?'

'Not one,' returned the doctor in his lazy voice.

At this moment they reached the entrance to the garden in front of the Palazzo Barberini.

'What 's to be done about my wife?' said Sir Theodore as they turned in.

'Perhaps she will have gone out.'

'If she hasn't? The truth is that Denzil evidently thinks Mrs. Denzil should not be kept in ignorance and my wife know.'

'Lady Cannynge certainly will have to know if the operation is to take place in her apartment.'

'Perhaps I needn't tell her till I have seen Denzil again, and explained. Then he can decide whether it would not be best to tell his wife at once.'

They were at the foot of the big stone staircase.

'He will not tell Mrs. Denzil till after Thursday's festivity,' said Doctor Ides. 'You can take my word for that.'

'And can he come in on the very day of the operation?'

'It is not desirable, and I told him so. But in the special circumstances, and as it only means a few minutes by motor, I will permit it at his urgent desire.'

As the doctor said the last words there was the sound of descending light feet on the stone, and Edna Denzil came round the angle of the staircase upon the two men. When she saw them she stopped.

'Oh, Theodore!'

She held out her hand to Doctor Ides, with the charming, slight smile which came so naturally to her rather pale lips, turning them up a little at the corners.

'I 've been up to see Dolores for a moment. I thought it just possible I might find Franzi here too. But he 's gone. That doesn't matter. What I wanted was to make sure Dolores would come to the present-giving as well as to the children's *festa* on Thursday.'

She put her face near to Doctor Ides'.

'It 's only my little son's birthday. But we 're in quite a turmoil over it, a happy turmoil *bien entendu*. I rather encourage a fuss on such occasions. Don't you think I'm

right? Children do so revel in a fuss. But it must be only now and then.'

'It does them good,' said Doctor Ides. 'A happy fuss acts as a tonic.'

'Doesn't it? If you can stand seeing the effect of the tonic, we shall be very happy to welcome you on Thursday evening. Lady Sarah is coming. But don't reply. Just see whether you feel inclined or not when Thursday arrives. Oh, Theodore!'—she turned to him quickly—'what's the exact thing in riding gaiters for a boy? I can't find out from Franzi because I missed him coming here. And I'm on my way to the Corso now. Do forgive me, Doctor Ides!'

She descended a step or two with Sir Theodore, and held a brief colloquy with him.

'Brown, of course! Yes—flexible. I know the exact thing now. Thank you, Theodore.'

She looked back at Doctor Ides from below. He noticed the cast in her eye and thought, as nearly all men did, how attractive it was.

'When my old Franzi fails me I always come to Sir Theodore. He has an instinct about children. Forgive me, please, for stopping you and interrupting your serious talk with my little son's gaiters. But he does think them of such supreme importance.'

'I'm going to tell my wife, doctor,' Sir Theodore said, almost sternly, when Mrs. Denzil had gone. 'It can't be helped whether Denzil wishes it or not. Mrs. Denzil will forgive it because of the reason—our getting things ready to—for Friday here. And besides—' His face was drawn and working.

'Besides my wife already knows something is wrong, and she will see—the truth is best.'

'Yes, I believe so.'

Sir Theodore put his key into the door. He was angry with himself for what he considered his lack of self-control. It seemed that he had not learnt, like Doctor Ides, to face death for others. His warm affection for Edna Denzil and the children tortured him. He felt like a coward—for them, and he felt guilty of insincerity towards one transparently sincere. This last feeling had really decided him to be

frank with Dolores at once. He needed, almost physically, that outburst.

'You shall see the bedrooms and decide what is best,' he said, as he let the doctor in. 'Remember you have only to say. Nothing will be inconvenient, nothing will be impossible.'

They passed through the sitting-rooms without finding Dolores, and presently stood before the door of her and Sir Theodore's bedroom, in front of the picture attributed to Luini.

'My wife is probably here. I'll just see,' said Sir Theodore.

Doctor Ides put on his eyeglasses and examined the picture carefully.

'Dolores!'

Sir Theodore tapped.

'Are you here?'

'Yes, come in, Theo!' answered a voice from within.

'One minute, Doctor!'

Sir Theodore went into the room and shut the door.

Dolores was standing before a long mirror let into the door which divided the bedroom from Sir Theodore's dressing-room, trying on hats. With her was a short, stout, and almost unnaturally swarthy woman, with a heavy nose, and large, but sunken eyes, who was standing up, gesticulating, and talking in the loud and ugly voice so often to be heard among the lower classes in Italy. Upon the floor was a number of large cardboard boxes, some open and some not. Three hats were ranged on chairs. One lay on the damask covering of one of the beds. Dolores had just put a fifth, pale yellow in colour with yellow plumes, on her dark little head, and still had her hands raised holding it when her husband came in. Not turning she looked at him in the mirror and said:

'You can help me, Theo, if you have a moment. Do you think yellow becoming to——?'

Her voice died away. She turned round to look into the living face at whose reflection she had been gazing.

'*Ma, caro* signore, I keep telling the signora that in all Rome—and may the Madonna send me sorrow if I say the thing that is untrue—in all Rome there is not a principessa——'

The strident voice broke off, then feebly added, with a note as of protest, '*ma, caro* signore!' and broke off again.

'Dolores, get rid of all this. I want to speak to you.'

There was an almost fiercely ironical sound in his voice, which Dolores had never before heard in it. She lifted the yellow hat from her head and handed it to the fat woman, whose features looked heavy with sulky indignation.

'Another day!' she said, with a gesture towards one of the boxes.

'I am to come again, signora?'

The voice grated in the room.

'Yes.' Dolores glanced at her husband. 'Sh!'

The woman began to collect the hats, casting side glances of sluttish condemnation at the tall man who had dared thus to break into woman's province, and scatter pleasures and gains to the winds with a look and a sentence she had not understood. Sir Theodore stood waiting in silence till at length she had finished and was stringing her boxes together preparatory to departure.

'Which shall I——'

'I 'll let you know.'

'Buon giorno——'

She did not get out a 'signora.'

'Buon giorno,' said Dolores.

The fat woman got away immersed in cardboard and waddling sideways, with the tail of her black gown leaping behind her, and her large hips swinging fiercely, with a sort of surging motion. When at last she was gone, Dolores looked at her husband. And her big eyes were a question. But though they were alone he did not reply to it. His pointed beard shifted as he moved his lips, which were pressed tightly together. He looked at and away from his wife two or three times, and it seemed to Dolores that in his glance there was a sort of deadly appraisement, such as might be in the glance of a cruel, or hostile, stranger.

At last he opened his lips.

'I 'm sorry to interrupt you,' he began.

'What does it matter? It was only hats,' she said, rather wearily, and in a little voice almost like a child's.

'But I 'd already interrupted your practising. You will think I have nothing to do but to play the curmudgeon.

But——' he hesitated. 'But the fact is, Doctor Ides is here, and——'

'Doctor Ides!' she said, no longer in a child's voice. 'Theo! are you ill?'

She was beside him almost before he knew she was going to move.

'No, perfectly well. But I want you to come and see Doctor Ides.'

She gazed at him.

'Who is ill? What is it? What is the matter? Do you think—surely you don't imagine there is anything wrong with me?'

Her small face had suddenly became full of suspicion.

'Of course not. But come with me and speak to Doctor Ides.'

He opened the door.

'Where is he?'

Dolores came from the bedroom and found the doctor before the Lunn. She held out her hand, with an evident effort to conceal her surprise at finding him there.

'I'm so glad you have come. Is my husband showing you the apartment?'

'Yes.'

'I suppose we have got rather a show bedroom, perhaps. You were coming to see it? Did Lady Sarah tell you about it?'

'Doctor Ides has a special purpose in coming here, Doloretta,' interrupted Sir Theodore.

Directly they were with this calm, elderly man, with the quiet blue eyes, and the quiet pink hands, Sir Theodore felt able to tell the truth to Dolores.

'Yes? Shan't we go somewhere and sit down?

'Let us come in here,' said her husband.

She led the way into the great bedroom, and the two men followed.

Sir Theodore shut the door.

'What is it?'

Dolores spoke to Doctor Ides. She sat down on the damask of her low bed and took hold of the carved wooden rail.

May I sit down?' asked the doctor.

He took a chair.

'Your husband has a proposition to lay before you. I am concerned in it. So he brought me here.'

'Doloretta, you know how bad Francis's voice has been for some time?'

She turned towards him, leaning her other hand on the bed, which creaked slightly.

'Of course.'

She stopped. In a moment she had grasped the truth which had so far eluded her.

'Francis is ill! His throat!'

'Yes, that 's it.'

'Very ill?'

Her glance travelled swiftly to the doctor. He was surprised by the ardent light which shone in her eyes, and could not interpret its meaning.

'I 'm sorry to say Mr. Denzil is in a very dangerous condition.'

'What are you going to do? Why did you wish to go through the apartment?'

'I shall have to operate on Mr. Denzil's throat next Friday. Your husband wanted to consult you as to whether it is feasible for the operation to take place here.'

'Here!'

She lifted the hand that had rested on the bed and indicated the room.

'Doloretta, I felt sure you would agree with me that we could give Francis a shelter in his great trouble,' began Sir Theodore hastily, and with a sort of strong decisive earnestness quite different from his manner hitherto. 'It is a matter of life or death. And — '

'No, no,' she interrupted him. 'You don't understand, Theo. Wait a moment, please.'

She got up gently from the bed and walked across the room, drawing down her eyebrows and knitting her brows. The doctor watched her, and took no notice of Sir Theodore. She turned just where there was an armchair, and sat down in it, with her thin arms on her knees, leaning very much forward.

'Is it a matter of life or death?' she asked Doctor Ides.

'Yes.'

'On—Friday!' she said, in a low voice.

Sir Theodore was still standing.

'Francis wishes to be at little Theo's birthday festivities,' he said.

'Edna—she doesn't know. No, she doesn't know.'

'No one knows but ourselves, and Francis of course.'

'He is not going to tell Edna?'

'Not till after Thursday.'

She looked at the two men, and neither of them could understand what was passing through her mind. But her face seemed to both of them to hold for a moment an expression of severity which made her look suddenly older.

'Poor——' she paused, then added, 'Francis!'

'Would you consent to the operation taking place here?' said Doctor Ides.

'Yes, oh yes.'

The look of severity left her face as she spoke, and there was a new eagerness that was almost violent in her voice. Sir Theodore moved, turning towards Doctor Ides.

'Ah!' he said.

But the intonation of his voice conveyed a 'There! That 's the woman who 's my wife!' as clearly as words could have done.

'Doctor Ides,' Dolores added. 'You will save him? You won't let him die?'

Suddenly she seemed to realise the absurdity of such appeals to a great surgeon, and she added quietly:

'Tell us what to do. Which room, or rooms, will you need? How ought they to be prepared? All our servants, except my maid, are Italians. But I will see to everything. You need not be afraid that your orders won't be carried out. There will be a nurse, I suppose?'

'Yes. I shall have to get a trained nurse. If it were in London I should need a skilled assistant to stay within call for the first twenty-four hours. But I will take his place here.'

'And if I can do anything you have only to tell me. Perhaps I don't look very strong, but I am. I've got more resisting power than any one would suppose.'

As Dolores said the last words a look of almost hard

defiance crossed her small face, and her eyes shone with determination.

'Come, come, Doctor!' she added, getting up swiftly. 'You haven't seen all the rooms. I'll show them to you—everything. We've got lots of space and air. And we'll take care of him here—won't we, Theo?—as he could never be taken care of among strangers. We'll help you to save him, Doctor. We'll help you to save him.'

She was transformed. The languid, exotic looking woman was gone. Energy, decision, almost feverish determination were alive, and showed in her. Sir Theodore thought of the hats, the woman before the mirror with uplifted hands. He heard the rather dawdling, almost plaintive 'You can help me, Theo. Do you think yellow becoming?' And he marvelled—and was thankful.

He was proud of Dolores at that moment.

Perhaps he would have marvelled more an hour later had he seen his wife. She lay stretched on the damask of her bed, the bedroom door locked. Her head was not on the pillows, but was on the same level as her feet. Her hands grasped the bed-clothes under the damask covering. And she was crying with a sort of desperation, and sobbing. Her tall, slim body was shaken by convulsive shudders. In her attitude, and in the sounds that came from her, there was expressed not only despair, but also a sort of rage.

Before Sir Theodore went away with Doctor Ides he had been for a few minutes alone with his wife. Touched and delighted by her energy, decision, unselfishness—as he supposed—and deep anxiety for Francis, and longing for sympathy, he had unburdened his heart. He had spoken with unreserve of his interview with Francis, and of Francis's wishes in case of his death.

'Francis is not going to die,' she had said; 'Doctor Ides, you and I—we won't let Francis die.'

Then, after an instant of silence, she had added:

'Do you believe in faith healing?'

'This is a case for surgery.'

'And after the operation?'

'Afterwards? Do you think——?'

'I'll tell you to-night, when we are quiet, what we can do for Francis.'

Then Sir Theodore had gone away with Doctor Ides, and Dolores had gone to her room to weep.

Faith! Where was it? Had she faith who had talked of it with such quiet conviction but a moment ago?

Destiny! Destiny! That was the terrible word which enveloped her mind like a great cloud as she lay and wept.

CHAPTER XIII

THURSDAY came and Edna Denzil had not penetrated the secret of her husband. She was, however, getting really anxious about the condition of his throat, and had spoken about it to him more than once.

'You're right, Ed,' he had answered. 'I'm going to attend to it directly Theo's birthday is over. Meanwhile I've given up smoking.'

That had satisfied her for the moment, and during the two days before the birthday the mother in her had ascendancy over the wife. Denzil saw that, realised how it helped him, and was thankful. The three children reigned and were joyous as never before. Their only grievance—and they thought of it but little, being far too exultantly active—was that 'Uncle Theo' was not to be seen. Sir Theodore dared not go to the Via Venti Settembre. He had none of Denzil's facial impassiveness, and could not trust himself in the presence of Edna. On the birthday he would make a mighty effort, and carry things through somehow. There would be bustle, excitement. Other people would be there. But he must keep away till then. He threw himself with a sort of sick energy into the arrangements made necessary in the apartment by the operation on Friday. But in all these it was Dolores who took the lead, under the direction of Doctor Ides. Sir Theodore was astonished by her practical sense, her coolness and her activity. Although, till now, she had had but little experience of illness, she behaved as one fearlessly exercising talents long perfected by familiarity.

'Your wife's a remarkably practical and energetic woman,' Doctor Ides said to Sir Theodore.

Dolores remarkably practical! Yet it was true. No doubt the hidden woman was coming out in the charming woman of the world, that woman who seems like a delicate flower, or a delicious butterfly, till she is given the opportunity to mother a man in his moment of need. Sir Theodore learnt a new respect for his wife, almost a new love for her. He had not suspected that she was so deeply attached to the Denzils as her present conduct seemed to show. But with his new respect for her there had come also a new sense of her mystery. He felt sometimes that though he had lived with Dolores for ten years, she escaped him, whether voluntarily or involuntarily he could not decide. Now and then, since the moment when she had been told of Denzil's condition, Sir Theodore had been conscious of an almost cold peculiarity in her demeanour, which troubled him vaguely even though he was dominated, was almost obsessed, by his grief for his friend. Specially strange to him had she seemed on the night after Doctor Ides' first visit to the Palazzo Barberini.

Sir Theodore had been with Doctor Ides at the Grand Hotel after dinner, and returned to the palace rather late. Almost directly he had let himself in he heard the voice of Dolores calling in the distance:

'Theo! Theo!'

'I am coming!' he answered.

'Theo! Theo!' repeated the voice insistently.

Hastily he shut the front door, put down his hat, and went towards the sound.

He was feeling tired, strung up, on the edge of his nerves, and terribly depressed. He would have been glad to see no one just then. Solitude was almost a necessity to his overwrought mind. He found Dolores in a dressing-gown waiting for him in the doorway of a small sitting-room which they seldom used, and which was called the moss-room on account of the moss-green colour of its hangings, its carpet, and its furniture.

'Come in here for a minute, Theo, please,' she said. 'I heard your key.'

'From here!' he exclaimed in sheer amazement.

to the floor and did something. The handkerchief disappeared. Then she went to a bureau, opened it, and took from it a whip, her present for little Theo. She stood still, looking at the whip. He saw the long curling eyelashes against her white cheek. She drew the whip two or three times through her fingers, as if meditatively, took some tissue paper, carefully wrapped the whip up in it, enclosed the tissue paper in brown paper, and tied the whole parcel with narrow brown ribbon. As her husband watched, at first vaguely, then gradually with the complete understanding of entire wakefulness, he hated the truth of that day with a deadly hatred.

How would Edna bear the telling? What was to be done about the children? Were they to know nothing? Was everything to be kept from them until, perhaps, their father was dead?

Dolores went out of the room. He felt sure she was going to the room where on the morrow the operation was to take place. She had left her gift lying on the bureau. Little Theo's birthday!

Sir Theodore got out of bed quickly. As soon as he was on his feet he felt a certain alleviation of his misery and dread. He went swiftly to his dressing-room and took a cold bath, turned on the shower bath and stood under it for two or three minutes. When he was dressed he wrapped up his present for little Theo, a small gold watch with the boy's initials engraved on it.

The giving of the presents was to take place at half-past ten. At half-past nine Doctor Ides called at the palace. He had engaged the nurse. She was an Irish girl called Ida Jennings. Now he brought her with him. Dolores was with them for a short time. When she came away from the interview Sir Theodore said to her:

'Will Edna ever be able to forgive Francis for this?'

'How can I know?' she answered.

'Think! Could you forgive it?'

'I think I could forgive anything that was done simply and solely out of love for me. I wonder if the carriage is here. The nurse seems very nice. I don't think she is going to be difficult. Have you got your present for Theo?'

She began quickly to draw on her gloves. They were

white. She was dressed in a pale blue-green gown. As he glanced at her critically Sir Theodore wished she had put on something darker. He thought she looked like a woman who was going to a wedding.

'Do you like it, Theo?'

'It 's a pretty colour.'

'But you don't like it?'

'I was only thinking that perhaps something rather darker——'

'This is a *festa*,' she interrupted.

'I know. But—think of to-morrow.'

She put her hand on his arm.

'Francis is going to get well. Remember that.'

Her fingers closed on his arm tightly.

'Help Francis, as I am helping him, by knowing that it is all right, that he is going to recover.'

'Have you said so to Doctor Ides?'

'Doctor Ides is a surgeon. He helps with the knife. We must help with our souls. There are many instruments.'

'The carriage is at the door, signora,' said Carlino, coming in with his anxious look.

Sir Theodore put little Theo's watch in his pocket.

'Come, Doloretta!' he said.

'The nerve of women!' he thought. 'Why, she 's got a will that I never suspected. She shames me. Can she have one of those strange instincts peculiar to women that tells her Francis will recover?'

He resolved to let Dolores carry him with her. He resolved if possible to give himself to her belief as a swimmer gives himself to a wave. Perhaps she knew. He looked into her dark eyes, searching in them for some strange truth connected with the Dazils. She lowered her heavy lids.

'There 's Carelli!' said Sir Theodore, as the carriage was passing the Ministry of Finance.

Dolores looked up, and saw Cesare Carelli mounted on a big-boned roan mare, bred in Ireland, and very clever over stone walls. He had hunted her the previous season. He took off his hat with a slight smile, showing for an instant his round white forehead, and thick curly black hair. His steady and shining eyes gazed gravely at the husband and wife under his dense brows, seeming almost to contradict

to the faintly smiling lips. The mare plunged violently, switching to and fro her short, broad tail, and looking sideways with her large eyes, shifty and very feminine. A tram passed and hid mare and rider.

'How strong and well the fellow looks!' said Sir Theodore, almost as if with condemnation. 'He 's kept a horse or two though he isn't hunting.'

'I dare say he will hunt again.'

'When a certain lady gives it up, perhaps,' said Sir Theodore. Then, with a sigh, he changed the conversation. The sight of the strong, square-shouldered and lithe young fellow mounted on the big, clever-looking mare had oppressed him. All these healthy lives—and his friend.

'Now for it!' he muttered, as the carriage drew up before the house in which the Denzils lived.

'It 's Uncle Theo!'

There was a shrill pipe from somewhere above. Sir Theodore looked up quickly, and saw the rosy face of Iris at a window, no longer judicial, but melted by excitement into a countenance that might appropriately have belonged to a successful plaintiff who had just been awarded enormous damages. The head of little Theo joined hers with a cry, and Vi, looking roguishly demure, and twisting her tiny nose, was visible for an instant in the background, uplifted in the the large arms of the ample Marianna, who nodded and smiled at the visitors with the unselfconscious warmth and intimacy of a valued Italian domestic.

Sir Theodore waved his hand. And as he made the lively gesture he also made a determined effort, and forced himself out of the black region of sorrowful apprehension.

'Those children!' he said.

He turned to his wife, who was now going up the steps into the house.

'It can't be! It shan't be!' he said. 'Doloretta, I believe you are right. I will believe you know. Francis will never be the same again. That 's impossible. But he will recover. He will live.'

'Send that to him,' she answered, 'send it to-night, when you 're asleep.'

CHAPTER XIV

To the present-giving the only people invited from outside, besides Dolores and Sir Theodore, were Lady Sarah Ides, who was devoted to the children, Signor Carpi, little Theo's Italian teacher, and Cavaliere Giuseppe Erdardi dei Marchesi di Villaserena. The presence of this latter was due to Theo's insistent petitions which on such an occasion his parents were unable to resist. It had been promised to Theo that as soon as he was nine he should be allowed to begin fencing lessons. Signor Erdardi was one of the best known fencing masters in Rome. Denzil had practised with him, and had selected him to teach Theo, who, having been taken to his school to see his youngest pupils at work, had on the spot conceived an almost awful devotion for the square-built, bright-eyed, short-bearded and iron-muscled Sicilian, whose *giù sedato! Giù! Giù!* rang through the great bare room, and whose play with the foils filled the boy with a respect that sent a sort of heat, like a flush, through all his small body.

'I want the Cavaliere on my birthday, mums,' he had said, growing rather red, but looking at his mother firmly.

'Cavaliere Erdardi?' she had answered, in surprise. 'Do you mean with all the children?'

'No, mums. How could he come with a lot of squits? I want him for my presents in the morning, when we're intimate.'

It was evident that Theo intended to confer upon the Cavaliere the highest token possible of his respect, to show that he set him quite apart from all the other fencing masters and gentlemen of Rome.

Denzil, when he was informed of the proposition, smiled and handed it on to the Cavaliere, who very seriously, and with every observance of strict etiquette, accepted it.

He had arrived before the Cannynges, dressed in a long frock coat, and carrying in his sinewy and broad-fingered hand a neatly folded pair of yellow kid gloves, and was engaging Denzil in conversation while the children, in another room, watched for the rest of their expected visitors.

would have remained solidly with the men, attentive to the tremendous pronouncements of great truths by the lips of his deity, had not his loyal heart feared to cast a seeming slight upon Uncle Theo if he omitted a welcome from the window.

Edna Denzil was busy tying up a last parcel and giving one or two directions to the servants. But as the children fell upon Sir Theodore, after more quietly and formally greeting Dolores, she came in smiling and happy, joyous in the children's joy.

'Dolores, I am glad you let me persuade you,' she said. 'It would not have been half a family *festa* without you.'

She gently took the hands of Dolores in both of hers. Suddenly Dolores bent down, and, with an unreserve seldom shown in public by one woman towards another, gave Edna a soft, and rather long kiss, not on her lips, but on her cheek near her hair. And almost as part of the kiss she breathed—'Oh, Edna!'

'Indeed I mean it,' said Edna, surprised but touched. For Dolores had never before shown such genuine and intimate feeling towards her. Approaching her face closer to that of Dolores, with her peering mannerism, she saw tears in her friend's eyes. Was Dolores thinking of her empty home? Edna believed she was, and was filled with a new tenderness towards her.

'The children think just as I do, I know,' she said. 'Theo is quite puffed up by pride at your caring to come. After the presents he's going to do—' she almost whispered—'a little recitation to surprise Francis; a bit of Shakespeare and "Crossing the Bar"'

'"Crossing the Bar!"' said Dolores.

'Yes, Tennyson's. Don't you like it?'

'Yes.'

'Perhaps you think it's not very suitable to a child.'

'Yes, yes, that's it,' Dolores said hastily. 'Don't let him say that, Edna, to-day. Don't let him say "Crossing the Bar."'

'Oh, but it's too late to change now. And he has learnt to say it not at all badly. Here's Lady Sally.'

Lady Sarah came in with her characteristic impulsive movement, as unselfconscious and, for the moment, almost

as buoyant as a wave. She knew nothing. With a wide gesture, that only one who had been a mother could have made, she took possession of the children for a greeting, then, all disarranged, with hanging veil and floating scarf, her bag bursting open in her hand and showering out its contents, she turned to the grown-ups, quite secondary, and proud of it, to-day. In the pleasant tumult caused by her entry the protest of Dolores was swallowed up, and as if it had never been. But Sir Theodore, rendered almost cruelly alive by the circumstances in which he was involved, had overheard it in the midst of his give-and-take with the children, and had longed to second it. The irony of Edna's choice must be surely unbearable to Denzil. Yet how to make a diversion?

There was a bustle over the contents of Lady Sarah's bag, which nearly ended in minor tragedy; for Theo, in his ardour of politeness, got hold of his own dropped present, and had difficulty in not feeling that it was something in the form of an animal's head. He bravely tried to trick his intelligence, and, as he handed the parcel back to Lady Sarah, said earnestly:

'I haven't felt what it is, I haven't really. It only seemed a tiny little bit like something's head with ears.'

'Snipping's head!' piped Viola, with staring eyes.

'What 's head?' demanded Iris, almost sternly.

'Come, Iris, would you like me to play you a tune?' said Dolores, knowing the weakness of Iris, and anxious to make a diversion.

For she felt that Denzil was coming towards the room though she did not see him. And she dreaded unspeakably to see him, and, still more, feared her own dread.

'He is going to recover. He is going to recover,' she kept repeating to herself, as she sat down before the piano, with Iris standing at her side, and gazing intently at her.

'Why do you look like that?'

A firm voice startled her. It came from Iris.

'Like what, you little inquisitor?' she asked, calling up quick smile to her lips.

'As if you wanted to make somebody go and do something—and he didn't want.'

'What shall I play to stop her?

The thought rushed through the mind of Dolores, and without consciously knowing what she was going to play, she began the Barcarolle from the *Contes d'Hoffmann*. Instantly the countenance of Iris changed, 'went to pieces' as Lady Sarah expressed it, melting into a honeyed expression of lax pleasure, and almost weak gentleness, that was comic in its abrupt abandon. She drew closer and closer to Dolores, looking from the player's face to her hands, and back again and again, twisting and pouting lips that seemed to be savouring some delicious bonbon, and slowly shifting her left leg in a languid exercise that almost grotesquely indicated complete subjection. Soon she was nestled against the player, as if she needed to feel one with Dolores, and that she had something to do with the production of the sounds that subdued her to rapture. She sighed. The leg was never still. Dolores felt large eyes fixed adoringly upon her. Striving to give herself wholly to the task, she played the sugary and luscious melody more rhythmically, with more pronounced and swaying languor, looking down at her long fingers.

But suddenly she felt that Denzil was entering the room.

She had not seen him since she had known of his fate. He had of course been told of her knowledge of it. How would they greet one another? Iris pressed more closely against her. If only the child would lower those staring and worshipping eyes! If only Edna would leave the room! If only——

'No! no!'

Iris was protesting as the music faded.

'But, Iris——'

'No, no! I want some more.'

'But it's time for the presents, I expect.'

Denzil was beside her. She turned on the seat and felt his hand on hers, and heard his whispering voice saying:

'Iris is a tyrant to a player like you.'

It was over—the meeting. She got up, saying to herself

'You are going to recover! You are going to recover!'

She did not look into Denzil's face as she answered lightly

'She must come to the Barberini. I will play to her for an hour. I seldom get such an audience.'

'Here's Signor Carpi!'

The master, big, mercurial, with turned up moustaches and ever-moving hands, came in with a laugh, as if determined to show he was nothing of a pedagogue when pleasure was in the wind. Little Theo, feeling himself the host, ran to salute him and set him at his ease in this gracious company.

'We're all here now!' was the cry.

And a sudden hush descended upon the gathering. In it Dolores stole her first glance at Denzil, and started. He looked, she thought, exactly as usual, calm, rather impassive, strongly sincere, bull-like still. What had she expected?

'Come along, children!' said Edna gaily. 'Show us the way to the room. Francis, you take charge of Vi. It's your day, Theo. You lead us off.'

'Yes, mums.'

Theo looked round with solemn excitement. His eyes rested on his hero, the Cavaliere, who was standing bolt upright with his arms at his sides, the yellow gloves firmly held in his left hand. Then he glanced hesitatingly at his mother.

'Ought I to——' he began, almost in a whisper, and drew in his under lip.

'Lead the way with the Cavaliere,' said Edna quickly.

'*Prego*, Cavaliere!' she added, with a gesture.

The Cavaliere looked much surprised, but he submitted with a formal bow to this extraordinary infringement of the rules of etiquette; and, moving with a bold suppleness which never deserted him, stepped forward, while Theo kept close at his side endeavouring, with eyes fastened on his legs, to emulate his glorious bearing and deportment.

The dining-room had been set apart for the function. The table was pushed up against the wall at one end, and on it in glory stood the birthday cake, minuteously firm, as it seemed to Iris and Viola who had stirred it. Wine, vermouth, and lemonade in jugs, with many glasses flanked it. At the other end of the rather long room was placed the 'birthday chair,' one of the large upright chairs with straight arms, covered with red damask, which are so often to be seen in Roman drawing-rooms. Beside it was a table. In front of it were some chairs carelessly arranged for the

present-givers. Edna wanted the little affair to seem an important function to the children, but she did not wish it to be formal. If it were, the brats would be chilled and the grown-ups would be bored.

'Come, Lady Sally! Where are you going to sit? Dolores, do you know Signor Carpi? He's turning Theo into a classic at express speed. My own child stumps me over gerunds and supines. But I am perfect in mensa. Don't laugh, Signor Carpi. Vi, sit by father close to the table. You have to begin. Have you got it ready?'

'Yes,' whispered Viola, slightly drooping her head and blushing as she gazed at a small parcel, carefully wrapped in silver paper, which she was holding tightly with both hands.

She nestled against Denzil.

'Will he like it?' she murmured earnestly.

Anxiety was beginning to wake in her. Denzil put his arm round her.

'Tremendously,' he answered.

'Oh, my little ones!' he thought.

He stared before him. Little Theo had now taken his seat on the red damask chair with a sort of modest pride, trying not to look too expectant, but quivering with anticipation. His brown hair fell over his brow. He was dressed in a new suit, with trousers, an Eton jacket, an Eton collar, and a small black tie. This suit emphasised his slimness. He was a mere wisp of a boy, though not short for his age. But he was a wisp full of fire, which glowed through his happy innocence, and seemed fed by it. Even the Cavaliere, searcher of the hearts of men though he was—'Character comes out when a man puts on the mask in my school!' was a favourite saying of his—even he observed his future pupil with a favourable, though instinctively appraising eye, and by a slight nod indicated that he was satisfied with his bearing.

There was a rustle. The servants came in, smiling and quite unembarrassed, behind the assembly of chairs, greeted by eager nods from the hero of the day, who then held on to the arms of his throne, and tried not to stare at Viola's little parcel.

'Now then, Vi!' whispered her father, making one of those

strange efforts which teach a man he has greatness, as well as smallness, within him, some of the resources of the divine as well as the frailties of the human being.

'You come too!'

Denzil took her minute hand and got up. And the touch of that tiny hand in that moment felt to him like the touch of life, and of all that a man clings to in this world.

Viola's present was a pocket-book, and had an immense success, all applauding vigorously when its red morocco beauties emerged from the silver paper, led and incited thereto by Lady Sarah, who threw herself into the spirit of the occasion with a soft exuberance that might have induced the stars to dance in their courses. Her genial and heartfelt gaiety seemed to undulate in waves through the room, and to set everybody and everything floating contentedly loose from all moorings of ordinary life. She helped Denzil as he had not thought it possible he could be helped through the ordeal. It was as if she knew, and let loose a torrent of pure and sparkling humanity that was irresistible even by agony of the soul. Dolores in that hour came really to love her. And Sir Theodore blessed the instinct which had led the Denzils to invite her on that day. But even her influence lay numb when the moment arrived which Dolores had been dreading ever since her conversation with Edna.

The table by the red damask chair was completely covered at last. The gold watch of Sir Theodore ticked in the shadow of the bull-dog's head, with an inkstand instead of a brain, which Lady Sarah had flung upon the floor at her joyous entry. The whip of Dolores was curled in a sporting manner round Edna's pair of ideal riding gaiters. A rather gaudy pin, representing the British flag, the tribute of Signor Carpi, defied battle and breeze in Theo's necktie. A fencing-mask given by the Cavaliere reposed upon an illustrated Shakespeare 'from your loving father.' Iris's selection, an air-gun, pointed its muzzle at the company. And little gifts from the servants, with 'make-weights' from Edna, boxes of chocolates, and several handsome presents from relations and friends at a distance, completed a brave show, which filled Theo's heart with inexpressible pride and pleasure, and affection for all humanity. It seemed that the whole world

was devoted to him, and thankful to see him mine.' In return he loved the whole world.

Denzil, under the impression that the ceremony was now at an end, got up.

'Shall we cut the cake?' he whispered.

'One moment, Franzi!' said Edna. 'We have a little surprise for you.'

Dolores began to arrange the veil on her hat.

'A surprise?'

Denzil was still on his feet.

'What a frightful cold he has!' Lady Sarah thought, with compassion. 'I really must get Mervyn to see him.'

For a moment her mind glanced away to the Grand Hotel and the 'perfectly happy man.' She looked again at Denzil and the animation died out of her lined and blunt-featured face, which immediately showed the strong impress of intimate sorrow.

'Yes,' said Edna.

Then speaking to the company generally, she added:

'Theo is going to speak two short pieces which he 's been studying up for to-day, as a surprise for his father. I thought you wouldn't mind hearing them, perhaps. The first is the speech of King Henry the Fifth, "Once more into the breach." The second is Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar."'

Denzil sat down quietly and turned his eyes towards his little son. He took hold of Viola's hand. Meanwhile Edna was speaking in Italian to the Cavaliere and Signor Carpi, who comprehended not one word of English, and was giving them some idea of the drift of the two recitations.

'Lo capisco! Lo capisco!' Signor Carpi kept exclaiming, wagging his large head, and making faces of keen intelligence.

The Cavaliere listened with grave attention, and the air of a man entering a province till now wholly unknown to him, but into which he goes fearlessly, and with the full intention of bearing himself in a thoroughly suitable manner.

'Si!—Si!' he said, and again, 'Si!—Si!'

And he drew himself up a little more, squared his large shoulders, placed his gloves on his left knee, and directed

his bright and unswerving eyes towards the red damask chair. The servants listened also while their mistress spoke. And they whispered to each other:

'Look at the signorino! He stands just like a little soldier!'

At a sign from his mother Theo had got up from his chair. He looked extremely serious, though very boyish, anxious, deeply anxious to do well, but not self-conscious. He glanced at his father, then gazed for a moment at the Cavaliere.

'Giù! Giù!' muttered the Cavaliere in his beard, mechanically repeating the phrase he was perpetually using to his pupils: 'Giù, seduto! Giù seduto!'

Theo did not hear the words, but he felt that the Cavaliere was testing him, was weighing him in a balance, and he resolved to strain every nerve to succeed. It did not matter to him that the Cavaliere knew no English. The speech was martial—and for Theo the Cavaliere incarnated in his short, square and supple person all that there was, or ever had been, of manly and daring virtues. He gave out the speech with a tom-tom fire for a child, and at the close made an effect such as he had never made during the rehearsals with his mother. Edna was surprised and delighted. Lady Sarah had tears in her eyes, and both Signor Carpi and the Cavaliere were evidently impressed. All Italians love an energetic delivery and abhor what is cold and unimpassioned. Signor Carpi broke into a tempest of bravos, beating his large hands energetically together, and making approving motions with his head. And the Cavaliere uttered a sonorous 'Bene! Bene! Benissimo,' which caused drops of perspiration to break out on Theo's brow. The servants in the background clapped and ejaculated. Iris and Viola were in transports of delight. But Denzil, for whom the whole thing had been prepared, made no demonstration. When the last lines:

> 'The game's afoot;
> Follow your spirit: and upon this charge,
> Cry—God for Harry! England! and Saint George!'

had been said, he leaned forward a little, staring at his boy

with an intentness that would have astonished Theo, had he noticed it. He lifted his hands twice and dropped them. Then he once more took possession of Viola, sat back and gazed straight before him, as Theo prepared to recite 'Crossing the Bar.' Neither Dolores nor Sir Theodore had joined in the applause. Edna noticed that, and feared lest they perhaps hated recitations by a child, even on such an occasion. Her husband's silence she thought she understood. It was caused, she believed, by pleasure, and perhaps by fatherly pride, carefully restrained in typical British fashion. But she began to be a little anxious about the Cannynges, and to wish she had omitted Tennyson's poem from the programme. However, it was too late to change anything now. Theo was beginning.

When he finished Edna was confirmed in her suspicion that her choice had been a mistake, despite Theo's success with the poem after her explanation at the rehearsal. The boy, carried away by the presence of the Cavaliere—Mars in a frock coat—by the excitement of life and its joys, which he was at that very moment experiencing, and by the strong effort which he had just made to be patriotic, and even pugnacious, could not enter into the spirit of 'Crossing the Bar.' The wine of life was bursting out of the wine-press. To-morrow he would put on his new leggings, would crack his new whip as he bestrode his pony. To-morrow he would solemnly assume mask and gloves, and stand up, rapier in hand, before the Cavaliere. Try as he would he could not realise the need of the pilot, the helplessness that overtakes even the strongest man in the hour of transition from life to the unknown. So he said the words clearly, earnestly, but not what most people would have called 'movingly.'

And just because of that he moved Denzil to the core of the soul. The boy did not understand death.

'He won't understand mine!' thought the father. 'None of my children will understand. If I disappear they must soon forget me in the joys of life. I oughtn't even to wish them to remember, to be a little sad because of me.'

And an extraordinary sensation of bitterness, and even of humiliation, went through him. He tried to strive against it, as against a strong tide. But he felt that he went down

before it, that it flowed over him, that for the moment it engulfed him.

There was a stir in the room. Vi pulled at her father's hand. People spoke. Little Theo was coming away from his red damask chair. Denzil roused himself, put his hand on his boy's shoulder. But he did not say anything. He only kept his hand there for a long moment, while Theo looked eagerly at him.

And so that strange ordeal, prepared ignorantly by the human being who loved him best in the world, passed as everything passes.

The Cunnynges drove away from the *fiesta* in silence.

Dolores had learnt to know herself in the last hour, and she was frightened. She faced strange, and surely dreadful possibilities in herself. Had her husband ever suspected them: when they sat in the moss-room, for instance, or when she was putting on her gloves to go out that morning?

When the late afternoon came she said to him:

'I'm very sorry, Theo, but I can't go to the Denzils again to-day.'

'But—not for the children's party?'

'I can't, I simply can't.'

There was a little break in her voice. Sir Theodore looked down.

'It's pretty hard to have to go,' he said. 'For any one who knows. But if Francis can go through with it——'

'Francis is——'

The tears came and prevented her from continuing.

'You must go without me, Theo,' she said, in a moment.

Then she left him quickly.

A solitary evening was before her. She did not expect Sir Theodore to come back before half-past nine, or ten. There was to be a supper for the children, and the few grown-up people who would be there would make that a substitute for dinner. In honour of little Theo's great age several big children had been invited. He had called them 'squits,' but that term was only intended to define their status as compared with the status of the Cavaliere. Vi, no doubt, would go to bed early. But the guests would stay certainly till nine o'clock, and probably till later.

Dolores ordered her dinner to be brought in to her on a

tray. When she had finished it she sat alone wondering how Francis Denzil would get through the evening. Now that she had seen Francis's and Edna's 'interior' on a great domestic occasion, Dolores had, as it were, returned to her humanity, had discarded for the moment her warped self. Far, very far, she had deviated from her true womanhood under the stress of a private trouble. So she believed now, as she sat alone, and recalled how Edna's cheek had felt under her kissing lips.

Presently she remembered that Nurse Jennings, the Irish girl whom she had seen for the first time that day, was sleeping in the apartment.

'I wonder what Nurse Jennings is doing?' Dolores thought. 'I'll go and see.'

But first she summoned a servant and inquired where the nurse was. The man replied that the 'signorina' had finished supper and had gone to her bedroom. Dolores went to knock at the door.

'Yes?' said a soft voice.

'May I come in for a minute?

The door opened.

'Oh, Lady Cannynge, is it you? Do you want me?'

'I'm alone. May I come and sit with you for a few minutes?'

'Oh, do please come in.'

The nurse was a tall, rather buxom, and radiantly strong-looking girl of perhaps twenty-five years of age, with Irish blue eyes, and reddish-brown hair. She had a beautiful complexion but was freckled. Her expression was honest, straight, not at all ignorant. Her manner was self-reliant. Dolores—she knew not why—felt rather shy as she looked at her.

'Were you reading?' she said, seeing an open book lying on a table to which a chair had been drawn up.

'Yes.'

The nurse closed the door.

'What is it? May I look?' asked Dolores.

She took the book up. It was *Handy Andy* by Samuel Lover. She put it down, hesitated, then sat on the chair. Nurse Jennings sat down composedly opposite to her.

'I hadn't read it for years,' she observed. 'But I re-

membered laughing over it till I nearly cried. I came upon it at Miss Wilson's in the Piazza di Spagna.'

'I've never read it. Do tell me—are you happy in your profession?'

'Yes. Why not, Lady Cannynge?'

'It seems to me such a terrible vocation.'

'Terrible!' said the nurse, getting suddenly red under her freckles, and setting her big lips together.

'I mean terrible for you. Of course it is a splendid and beneficent profession, and people are thankful to those who enter it. But for you, personally!'

'Oh, I see!' said Nurse Jennings, relaxing. 'But no, I like it. Otherwise I wouldn't stay in it.'

She looked steadily at Lady Cannynge with her firm eyes full of knowledge and unashamed.

'You will marry, I think, and give it up presently.'

The nurse reddened slightly.

'Who's to know? But I like nursing. But are you worrying about to-morrow?'

Dolores hesitated. She had a longing to open her heart to this girl whom she had seen that day for the first time. She was not going to do it, but she must talk to her, know her a little better. The fact that she was a nurse seemed just then to help Dolores.

'Yes, I am!'

'That's no good, is it?'

'Don't you ever worry?'

'Very seldom. I'm generally too busy.'

'And yet I suppose you see a great deal of tragedy.'

'I do now. I used to take maternity cases when first I began. But lately I've had a lot of bad operations. Many patients recover though. I set those off against the ones who don't. I try to look at it that way.'

'I'm afraid I never could. But—I want you to tell me something.'

'Certainly, Lady Cannynge.'

'Do you believe in faith healing?'

'Oh dear!' exclaimed Nurse Jennings, with a sudden access of brogue. 'You don't mean that you're one of those Christian Scientists? If you'd been in the hospitals like me, you couldn't do with them at all.'

I 'm not one. All I want to know is this. Do you think the steady belief that some one who is dangerously ill is going to get well helps them—him or her—to get well?'

'Oh, I daresay it does no harm. But I 'm one that believes in clever surgeons.'

'What do you think of Doctor Ides?'

'He 's a marvel. Did you hear how he got the shawl-pin out of that woman at Richmond with Brunings' telescopic tube and the forceps?'

She drew up her chair and launched forth, with Irish volubility, into the relation of a series of wonderful 'cases.' She was still relating and explaining when a distant clock in the apartment struck loudly ten. Dolores got up, as if almost startled.

'It 's ten.'

'Dear me! Is it really?'

'My husband ought to be back directly.'

She held out her hand.

'You 've done me good.'

'Have I, Lady Cannyngc? How?'

'By telling me of the marvels of science, and by—I don't know. But if I am ever ill I think I should like to have you to nurse me.'

Nurse Jennings beamed.

'I should be very glad to come, I 'm sure. But don't be ill. And if you ever are, don't be "thought over."'

She laughed.

'No,' said Dolores. 'But—I think faith helps. Good night, Nurse.'

Half an hour afterwards, when she was still sitting up, she heard a footstep. It must be Theo 's. She was seized by a sickening sensation of nervousness as she looked towards the doorway by which he would probably come in. What would he have to tell her? Did Edna know now?

'How will it affect Edna's feelings towards me?'

Swiftly Dolores strove to put herself imaginatively in the place of Edna, to put Edna in her place. It seemed to her that she succeeded in that effort, and again she was afraid of herself.

Sir Theodore, coming in slowly two or three minutes after

she had heard the footsteps, found her sitting upright, and staring towards him.

'Still up!' he said.

'Yes. I couldn't go to bed till you came. Besides it is not very late.'

'No.'

She felt sure that he wished she had gone to bed, perhaps that she was asleep. But to-night she could not govern herself by his desires.

'The children? Did they stay very long?'

'Till about nine.'

'Only till then? Then you stayed on after they had gone?'

'Yes, for a little. Francis wished it.'

'Theo, sit down for a minute.'

Reluctantly, she thought, he obeyed her.

'Aren't you going to bed?' he asked.

'Soon. Does—does Edna know?'

'Yes,' he answered.

And he sat with his head drooped a little forward, staring before him. There was a long silence.

'Tell me,' Dolores said at last. 'I know you—you hate it, Theo, but I must know. I think I have a—it is natural, after all we have done together to get ready for to-morrow, that I should wish to know.'

'Yes, I daresay. What is it you wish me to tell you?'

'How—how did Edna bear it?'

Sir Theodore turned in his chair and lifted his eyes.

'Doloretta, it was like this.'

He took her hand and held it, and it was hot within his.

'How hot your hand is!' he said, surprised. 'You haven't got fever?'

'No, no. I am perfectly well. Tell me.'

'There's very little to tell. The party—I suppose it went off well. The children enjoyed it, I suppose. I scarcely knew what I was doing. But we played, danced, pulled crackers, acted charades, dumb crambo. Yes, I believe they were quite happy. They must have been. At last they began to go. Vi was already in bed. I thought of going then. But Francis stopped me. We were left alone, Edna, he and I. I didn't know what he wanted, what he

meant to do. "Stay here!" he said. His voice was nearly gone. "Come, Ed, you must be tired. Say good night to Theodore. I'll come back in a minute and——" his voice quite went. I saw Edna look at him then in a new way. It was at that moment that she suddenly knew something was coming upon her, I think. But she only came to me and said "good night," and went away with him.'

Theodore stopped speaking for a minute.

'I don't know how long he was away—Francis. It seemed to me a very long time. However, at last he came back. I didn't look at him. He just said, "It's all right. She sends her love—blessings for all you've done, and this for Dolores."'

Dolores moved.

'I meant—to give it to you to-morrow morning,' said Sir Theodore.

He drew a note from the pocket of his coat and gave it to Dolores. She opened it and read, in Edna Denzil's large handwriting:

'Thank you, dear Dolores, for all you are doing for my Franzi.—EDNA.'

Dolores sat still for a long time looking towards the writing. But she only saw it faintly. There were tears between her and it.

'I couldn't have done that!' she was saying to herself. 'No, I couldn't have done that!'

CHAPTER XV

VERY early on the morrow Dolores and Sir Theodore had a brief, but anxious consultation. Francis Denzil and Edna were expected at the Palazzo Barberini at half-past nine. And as the time for their arrival drew near the Cannynges had abruptly realised Edna's position, and their own in regard to her, now that she knew the truth. It might be almost intolerable to her to feel herself a guest, to have to

neet even the closest friends, in such a moment of emotion nd dread.

'We ought to have thought of it sooner,' Dolores said. We ought—at any rate I ought to have left the apartment. t should belong to Edna. She ought to be mistress here, luring these days.'

'Perhaps it would have been better. I have had no time o think of that. There has been so much,' said Sir Theodore, anxiously.

'Shall I go now?'

'Go! Where to?'

'To a hotel.'

'But you can't go alone. And I hardly like——'

He hesitated. He felt that he must remain, that if he eft the palace, even from scrupulously delicate motives, it would seem like a desertion of his friend.

'Theo,' Dolores said, with decision. 'In an hour like this we can be frank, you and I. It is you who are the great friend, it is you whom the Devrils love.'

'But——'

'No, no. I came into their lives because of you. That is why I think it best for me to go. But you must stay; I see that.'

'That will seem very strange, I think. Edna may not understand.'

'Such a thing won't trouble her in such a moment. Let me go.'

She got up, as if with the intention of making immediate preparations for departure.

'It will be much more delicate,' she said. 'And Edna has always treated me perfectly.'

She thought of that note which she had not destroyed. 'I shall leave a letter for her, of course.'

She was about to go away, but her husband stopped her.

'I don't like this idea,' he said.

'Why not?'

'I don't like your going away while I remain here.'

'But——'

'No, Doloretta. That really can't be. You have—it is you who have supervised, arranged——'

'What has that to do with it?' she interrupted.

'A great deal, everything almost. You have been wonderful. I didn't know——'

'Please don't bother about all that, Theo,' she said, rather coldly. 'Any woman naturally superintends things in her own home.'

'Stay in your home. I feel I must stay. If I went it would seem almost like a desertion of Francis.'

'That is just what I think now.'

'And you must stay too. You need not see Edna. You can remain in your own room. And if Edna feels equal to seeing you, asks for you, then you will be here. I feel pretty sure she will wish to see you. She has such a warm heart, such a great sense of gratitude. I know she will never forget how ready you were——'

'Oh, please don't, Theo!'

He was silent.

'Very well. I suppose I had better stay. But it must be as if I were not here, please, unless Edna strongly insists on seeing me.'

'I believe she will.'

'Theo, women understand each other much better than men ever understand them. I don't think Edna can really wish to see me at such a time. Therefore please try to manage so that I am not seen. Then I shall not mind so much having stayed on here.'

She went out of the room.

Sir Theodore wondered at the mixture of deep emotion, of practical energy, of feverish anxiety, and of almost petulant irritability which she had shown during the last difficult days and just now. But he had little time to dwell on the mental condition of his wife. The thing was settled. They were to remain in the apartment, both of them. There was an end of that. Francis—from this moment till the operation was over, he must think only of Francis!

Dolores went to speak to her friend, Nurse Jennings. The nurse greeted her with a cheerful, confident smile.

'Do you wish to see the room?' she asked.

'No, not now. You have found the servants ready and willing to do everything necessary, to get anything that is wanted immediately?'

'Oh yes, indeed. I know how to manage with anybody.'

'Then I will go.' I am going to shut myself up in my room so as to be quite out of the way till—till it is over.'

Nurse Jennings smiled again.

'Now, don't worry, Lady Cannynge,' she said.

'I am not going to.'

To herself Dolores was still repeating, 'He is going to recover. He is going to recover.'

She went away to her bedroom, shut herself in, and took up a book. It was *La Guerre et la Paix* of Tolstoy. Sir Theodore must have laid it down in the bedroom with its companion volume in Russian. He was going on with his study of Russian. 'To what end?' often he asked himself that. But he continued to study, as he continued to fill up his empty hours with other occupations, for which he felt little enthusiasm.

Dolores, opening the volume near the end, began to read deliberately, carefully. She had chanced upon the passage in which the author describes the change that came upon Natasha when Pierre had made her the mother of a family. Dolores had read the book, and well remembered the exquisite charm and attraction of Natasha as an unmarried girl. Now, as she forced herself to read it again, she thought 'And that is what motherhood does to some women! That is what it might do to me!' It seemed to her that Natasha, the mother, was almost ugly, almost repellent, compared with Natasha the girl, who sang, danced, loved, and always with grace, almost always with a sort of mystery, the mystery of elusive, and yet vehement girlhood. Did motherhood mean a sinking down into a sort of slough of materialism? There was something almost indecent in Natasha, the mother.

'Should I become like that, if——?' thought Dolores.

She sat with one hand on the page and mused.

'And would Theo love me more—like that?'

She heard a door shut in the distance.

'But Edna—she is not like that. Is she?'

And she began to compare herself with Edna Denzil, carefully, almost coldly. Was Edna more, or less, charming, as the mother of a family than she had been before the children came? Certainly she still had charm. Dolores knew that, and was strictly fair in acknowledging it. But did that

charm proceed from her motherhood, or did it persist in spite of that? Girl, wife, mother—Edna was always charming. And—as widow?

'How hateful I am, how hateful, and how false to my own determination! Francis will recover, he will recover!'

There was a knock on the door. Dolores started up.

Sir Theodore opened the door. He looked as if under the brown of his complexion he had become dreadfully pale.

'They have come, Dolores.'

'They?'

'Francis and Edna.'

'Yes?'

His quick eyes saw the book.

'You are reading!' he said.

'I was trying to. It is better than sitting and thinking of dreadful things.'

'I see—yes. But—they both wish to see you at once.'

'Oh, but——'

'You cannot refuse. They both wish it—Edna too.'

'Of course I will come.'

Filled with a sort of heavy dread, almost like that of a child, Dolores followed her husband.

Edna Denzil and Francis were alone in a room next to that in which the operation was to take place. They were sitting side by side on a sofa when the Cannynges came in. Directly Dolores saw them she felt as if some horrible core, hard, abominable, even diseased perhaps, in her heart melted. And this happened even before she had looked into their faces. The sight of their two bodies, leaning a little towards each other, bending a little, was enough. Poor bodies, that love so much, joined in the mystery of the flesh! But when she looked into Edna's face, then she suffered indeed, and was moved in the very depths of that womanhood which acknowledges itself part of a great company of sisters. For Edna Denzil was changed.

Never a pretty woman, but nearly always a radiant woman, the shock she had endured had withered the charm that was made, perhaps, out of sunbeams. Her irregular features, no longer lighted up, seemed to thrust forward into notice their plainness. The defect in her eye was become a blemish now that the sweet light of joy had gone out of

her eyes. To the casual observer she would have looked a meagre, plain, and even perhaps unattractive woman at that moment. Dolores saw it, realised it all. But at that moment she felt as if she was in Edna's heart, and almost as if that heart were her own. And she went to Edna, put both arms about her, and kissed her. And as she did so she heard Edna's voice whispering against her shoulder, 'Thank you—for everything.' She held the hand of Francis in hers for a moment. Perhaps he said something. She did not know. But she heard herself saying to him:

'I shall pray for you, Francis. I shall pray for you.'

Voices were audible in the next room. A door opened.

'Edna, what do you wish to do while—while it is going on?' Dolores said quickly.

'I will sit here within reach.'

'Shall I——? No, you won't want me.'

'Thank you, Dolores.'

Dolores kissed her again, clasped the arm of Francis, and went away.

She returned to her bedroom, shut and locked the door, knelt down and began to pray.

'Not for my sake, but for Edna's sake!'

She repeated these words in her prayer again and again, with a perseverance that became at last almost monotonous.

'For Edna and the children! For Edna and the children!'

Bright circles formed before her shut eyes against which her hands were pressed. She knelt thus for a long time. But presently she ceased from prayer. It seemed to her that a decision had been come to—far off, that it was irrevocable, and that therefore it was useless for her to pray any longer. She did not know what this decision was. It might be in conformance with her intense, her almost desperate desire, or not. In either case further supplication could avail nothing. Afterwards she often wondered why such a strange idea had come to her, and, still more, why she had entertained it so unhesitatingly, with such absolute confidence. She felt that she simply knew. Yet she did not rise from her knees. She had no desire to move, and so she remained as she was.

When at length she did move her eyes ached from contact

with her pressing hands. How long had she been kneeling? She looked at her watch.

It was eleven. Had the doctors begun their dreadful task punctually? She wondered. And she wondered what Theo was doing, where he was. Probably he was sitting with Edna in that room close to where Francis was being saved, or not saved.

Again Dolores took up *La Guerre et la Paix*. She read it steadily for twenty minutes, without emotion. It meant scarcely anything to her. Nevertheless she did not miss a word, and she knew what she was reading about. Her head was quite clear, her nerves were surely quite steady. The feeling that a certain matter was decided brought a sort of solace to her.

But where was Theo? What was he doing all this time? Presently this question recurred to her mind, persisted in it, and began to make her feel restless. She laid her book down, and sat for some time doing nothing. There was not a sound to be heard in the apartment. She got up, went to the door, and softly unlocked it. There was no reason now why it should be locked. She did not open the door, but returned to her chair, sat down and waited.

While she was on her knees the time had passed like a flash. Now it dragged. Why did not some one come? Surely the operation must be over. Perhaps every one had forgotten about her. Perhaps no one would think of coming to tell her the result. But Theo—surely he would come. He knew where she was.

He did not come. No one came. And at last Dolores got up and went to the door. She partially opened it, held it, and listened. Then she opened it wide, went out, and, walking gently, made her way to the room where she had left Edna. The door of this room was shut. She waited outside of it for a minute. Now that she was so near to the chamber in which the fate of Francis was being decided, she felt more strongly than ever before the mystery and the terror that had taken possession so abruptly of her home, and of those who were in it.

At last she made up her mind not to hesitate any longer. And she opened the door and looked into the room. She saw Edna Denzil and her husband in it. They were sitting

still, unnaturally still as it seemed to Dolores. Edna was facing her in a chair close to the door which communicated with the room in which Denzil, the doctors and the nurse were. Sir Theodore had his back turned towards her. Neither of them was doing anything. And though Edna was exactly opposite to Dolores, as the latter looked in at the door, she saw not her. For her eyes were shut. Dolores knew, as she gazed at her for a brief instant, that Edna needed darkness just then because the cloud was upon her Franzi. She was waiting till he opened his eyes again on the world. How strange, how altered, how almost dead she looked in her ruthless immobility! And how strangely motionless Theo was! Dolores had not known that a live and conscious human being could remain so absolutely without movement.

She drew the door towards her, did not quite shut it, and went back to her bedroom. Not very long afterwards Sir Theodore tapped and entered. Dolores looked at him without speaking.

'It is all over,' he said.

Dolores gazed.

'All over!' she said, coming slowly towards him.

'The operation I mean.'

He sent her a strange, it seemed to her almost a terrible, look, as if he suspected her of something.

'Yes.'

'He has recovered consciousness. Edna is in the room with him.'

'Yes,' repeated Dolores.

Sir Theodore began to walk about the large room.

'I have been sitting with Edna all the time,' he said. 'I felt that I could not leave her alone. Do you think I was right?'

'Quite right.'

'I believe, I hope, it was some comfort to her. She must have known I was sharing her frightful anxiety.'

He was opposite to the large dressing-table which was covered with boxes and bottles of cut glass. He stood still, picked up a bottle, looked at it, put it down.

'You were here?' he asked.

He did not wait for a reply, but took up another bottle and pulled out the stopper.

'There is nothing so hideous as waiting,' he continued. 'Nothing. Anything is better than suspense.' He put the stopper back. 'But of course we can't know yet.' He withdrew the stopper. 'He has regained consciousness, and the operation has been successful in that, the—the trouble has been taken away. But of course——' He took out his handkerchief and poured some eau-de-Cologne on it.

Dolores was sure that he did not know what he was doing. He put the handkerchief into his pocket, put the stopper into the bottle, set the bottle down, and picked up a powder-box.

'Ides will be able to tell us something directly—perhaps. I don't think——' He removed the lid of the powder-box. 'What made you say "all over!" like that, Doloretta, just now? Did you think—did you suppose that——?'

'I only wanted to know exactly what you meant.'

He put the lid back, and turned round to her.

'Have you done what you intended doing all this time?'

'Do you mean——?'

'You remember what you said about faith healing.'

'Last night I did it.'

'Let us go on—let us go on. I am sure that Francis will recover.'

'I have been praying that he may.'

'Praying, but——'

He was about to say that to pray that something may happen shows a doubt as to whether it is going to happen. But he did not finish his sentence.

'I wonder whether prayer is of any good except to those who pray,' he said. 'Do you really suppose—you, Doloretta—that a petition to God from you, or let us say from me, could possibly lead to any change in the fate of Francis? If he were destined to die, do you believe we, by our prayers, could cause that decision, if it is a decision, to be changed?'

'Not now,' she answered.

Sir Theodore came away from the dressing-table.

'Not now! What do you mean by that?' he asked, looking down into her eyes.

'While I was praying—after some time—there came to me the conviction, it seemed like knowledge, that the matter of Francis's living, or dying, had been decided irrevocably.'

'That was only a fancy, of course,'

'Perhaps. But I could not pray any more.'

'And that other thing? The exertion of the mind, of the will?'

'Theo, I've done all I can. And I feel that to try to do anything more would be utterly useless.'

He said nothing for a minute. Her words, or perhaps something in her manner, had evidently made upon him a painful impression, against which, she thought, he was trying to struggle. At last he said:

'All these things are out of our hands. Very little'—his voice became suddenly bitter—'is in our hands. We are pigmies filled with the desire to be giants, or even gods.'

'Ah!'

'But have you any feeling as to what may be going to happen, one way or the other?'

Dolores remembered the hour when she had lain upon her bed and wept. Then he had felt almost as if she knew what would follow the operation. Afterwards he had combated that feeling, and had surely slain it. She had willed that it should be proved absurd. And now?

'No,' she answered. 'I feel quite in the dark. We can only wait.'

'And hope for the best.'

She said nothing. Her mind was incapable just then either of hope or of active fear. Sir Theodore put his hands into the pockets of his dark blue serge jacket. He had suddenly become aware of his own restlessness.

'And hope for the best!' he repeated carelessly.

'Have you seen Doctor Ides?'

'Only for an instant.'

'I suppose I couldn't see Nurse Jennings?'

'I don't know. Presently!'

'I like that Irish girl.'

'How freckled she is!'

'Is she?' Dolores said.

'I don't mean to say she's bad looking.'

'It's a face I should be very glad to have by me if I was very ill.'

'She's an excellent nurse, I believe. I'll go now and learn how things are.'

He went to the door.

'What are you going to do, Doloretta?' he said, as he was about to go away. 'Wouldn't it be best if you went out and got some air? You look very pale.'

'When am I anything else?'

'There are different kinds of paleness. But just as you like. I daresay you feel you would rather be on the spot, as I do.'

He withdrew his hands from his jacket pockets, plunged them in again and went out.

The news of the dangerous illness of the Councillor of the British Embassy spread rapidly through Roman society, and caused great astonishment.

'But I saw him out only the day before yesterday, looking as well as ever he did in his life!'

'Most extraordinary thing to keep it so quiet!

'But there was a party at the Denzils only yesterday! I know it, because my children were there.'

'Even his own ambassador knew nothing till a few hours before the operation.'

'He always smoked too much, poor chap!'

Such remarks were made in the English and American sets. In Italian circles a great deal of attention was devoted to the fact that the operation upon Denzil had taken place in the Palazzo Barberini. This was generally condemned, and universally thought to be an extraordinary circumstance. Princess Mandelli did not say anything against it, but she could not understand the matter. If Sir Theodore was the lover of Mrs. Denzil, as she and many other Italian ladies had come to believe, why should he carry hypocrisy to such unnecessary lengths? And why should Mrs. Denzil, whom one did not wish to condemn too uncharitably for liking such a handsome and attractive man as Sir Theodore—why should she take her husband to be operated upon in the house of her lover? And then Lady Cannynge's attitude! That, too, was extraordinary. Why should she turn her beautiful apartment into a hospital to suit the convenience of people whom she must surely dislike, if not hate in her heart?

The Princess spoke of the matter with Montebruno, who had recently returned to Rome from the French Riviera.

'I shall never learn to understand the English,' she said to him. 'Although I have English blood in my own veins. Of course they are called the "mad English." But that is merely a saying. They are different, so they are mad. That does for the man who sells hot chestnuts, or the woman who eats *pasta sciutta* under Queen Margherita's portrait in the den of the concierge. But of course it is not for us. Do you think Lady Cannynge knows?'

'*Cara* Lisetta—what?' said Montebruno in his harsh and weary voice, which had no resonance, no softness.

'About her husband and Mrs. Denzil?'

'Women always know such things, men scarcely ever know them.'

'Yet she receives Mrs. Denzil at such a moment. He may die in her apartment, and leave Mrs. Denzil and Sir Theodore free to do whatever they like.'

'Free! Lady Cannynge will still exist even if Mr. Denzil should die.'

'I do not think Dolores Cannynge is the sort of woman who would fight in a case like that. She would probably not count. Her strength would never be in fighting.'

'Where would it be, *mia cara*?'

'In being conquered, I think.'

'Ah!' said Montebruno.

He looked at the Princess steadily for more than a minute. Then he said:

'I am getting old and dull witted.'

'Don't be ridiculous, Giorgio!'

'No, but tell me exactly what you mean by this enigma.'

'I mean that if Dolores Cannynge were ever conquered, her conqueror would probably become her slave.'

When Montebruno spoke again, which he was in no hurry to do, he said:

'Shall I go this evening and inquire how Mr. Denzil is?'

"Yes, do. I should like to know. Poor fellow! And just as he had got what he wanted, Munich.'

'That is how things are in this world. And there is no other for us. Even the Americans have found out that.'

'The Americans!'

'Their great Edison has said it.'

'Then that is settled!' observed the Princess, with a smile not devoid of contempt.

'It is not only from the United States that I get it,' said Montebruno.

'From where then?'

He touched his bald and yellow forehead with his long-nailed forefinger.

'From here.'

The Princess put her hand lightly on her heart.

'And from here—do you get nothing?'

He went out, slowly shaking his head.

Late in the evening he drove up in a hired fiacre to the Palazzo Barberini, left his card, and inquired how Mr. Denzil was.

The Cannynges' *maestro di casa*, a middle-aged Roman, with a dignified, almost intellectual face, and grave, expressive eyes, lifted his hands.

'The poor signore is very ill! very, very ill!'

Montebruno, in suitable terms, expressed a lively regret. No doubt the shock of the operation had greatly tried the strength of the patient.

'Si, Signor Marchese. It is his heart, I think. But how should I know?'

Again he lifted his hands, and raised his large and prominent eyes.

'What a pity! what a pity! Let us hope all will go well!' observed Montebruno.

'And why should we not hope?' responded the *maestro di casa*.

He stood respectfully at the door while Montebruno turned and descended the wide staircase.

'And why should we not hope?' he repeated to himself, as at length he closed the door softly.

Early the next morning, despite every effort of the doctors to combat the shock to the system caused by the operation, Francis Denzil succumbed to heart failure.

In the evening of the same day, in the first edition of *La Tribuna*, his death was announced, and a short account was given of his career in diplomacy, followed by the graceful expressions of regret at his loss, and sympathy for his wife

and young children, which Italian journalists know so well how to turn.

Among the many who read this notice was Cesare Carelli. He took in *La Tribuna*, and always glanced through it before he went to bed. On this occasion, however, he had bought a copy in the entrance hall of the Salone Margherita, whither he had gone with three friends, young men fond of sport, and with eyes ever warily on the look-out for new pretty women on the variety stage. They occupied the box on the left of the scene, and as soon as they were in it Cesare opened his paper widely and began to read, without casting even a glance at the performer of the moment. He read on steadily, sitting well in the front of the box, close to the crowd in the Poltrone, to whom he paid no attention, and of whom he did not once think. His companions calmly stared at the wriggling and half-pleading, half-defiant, young woman on the stage, who swing her short, puffed-out skirts, walked to and fro, showed her rows of excellent teeth between heavily painted lips, and occasionally—with a mechanical gesture—touched one of her darkened eyebrows, as she rather spoke than sang a popular street song. When, as happened almost immediately, the young men had made up their minds that as a body—they did not think of her as a singer—she was unworthy of their attention, they turned away and took long and deliberate stock of the audience. To Cesare they paid no attention. When he had finished what he was doing he would throw away his paper, and exist.

Presently the girl, with a last swing of her skirts, and a peculiar waggle, almost circular, of her right leg, disappeared, without a sound of appreciation from even one spectator. The curtains drew together, opened again, and amid clapping Anita di Landa walked on, looking steadily, almost threateningly, at the hundreds of faces before her, and up at the circle where the smoke wreaths mounted and dispersed. She sang song after song, and every song was greeted with cries of "Bis! Bis!" and still Cesare read calmly on, sitting well forward in his chair. At length the singer indicated by gestures that she did not want to sing any more. She put out her pretty hand, and, smiling but looking determined, pretended to push the shouting men away from her with its

delicate, pink-flushed palm. She shook her head and drew down her eyebrows, making a face expressive of fatigue.

'Zampugnaro! Zampugnaro! Zampugnaro!' shouted the young men, and not a few of the old ones too.

Cesare glanced up for the first time.

'Zampugnaro!' he too cried in a loud, firm voice.

Anita di Landa sent him a side glance, which was like a glance of rebuke, shrugged her shoulders, and made a signal to the conductor. The applause ceased, and the orchestra played the opening bars of the song every one wanted.

Cesare, satisfied now that his loud and decisive cry had been obeyed, returned to his newspaper, and his eyes fell on the word *Lutto*. And as Anita di Landa sang the delicious country song, with its suggestion of reeds, and its imitation of the pipes of Arcady, Cesare read the announcement of the death of Francis Denzil in the apartment of the Cannizzaros. He had a real love of the old and characteristic little song, which only Anita di Landa can sing as it should be sung. There was caught in it something of the open air, of Italian country scenes, olive-covered slopes, vines opening on hills stretching down from grey hill towns, with rough walls and Campanili, to long plains covered with waving corn, dotted with mulberry trees, and threaded by white roads deep in dust, along which the wagons drawn by the lumbering oxen pass, while the drivers lie and sleep, with flowers, or bits of green, behind their ears. And there was caught in it, too, a sound of rustic love; love in the open air, far from cities, far from social trammels, far from the prying eyes of those who chatter in drawing-rooms; of love under silver green olives, of love by streams in the grasses:

> 'Nu Zampugnaro 'e nu paese 'e fora
> Lassaie quase n' ughanza la mugliera,
> Se partette pe Napule 'e bon 'ora
> Sunanno allero allero allero, allero!
> 'ma nun era overo
> 'o Zampugnaro
> pensava 'a mugliera,
> e suspirava,
> a zampogna 'e suspire s'abbuffava.'

Cesare read, and heard Anita di Landa's voice singing while he read. And for ever afterwards the song of the

Zampognaro was connected in his mind with the freedom of Mrs. Denzil—he thought of her husband's death as her freedom—and with the movement of his own strong life onward in a direction which might lead him to his greatest desire:

> 'E ullero, ullero!
> Che bella zaccella,
> Che bella vesella
> Facev a Gesu!
> Quando 'a Madonna
> Cantava—core mio, fa nonna nonna!'

He put down his paper at last, leaned forward on the ledge of the box and looked at Anita di Landa. But he saw a little osteria in the mountains, with vines leaning above its door. And he heard larks singing in the midst of a great solitude.

CHAPTER XVI

At the beginning of March, about a month after the death of Francis Denzil, there was a great skating party in the palace of the Duchess Muravanti, not far from the Corso. The Duchess was a widow, rich, cheery, kind-hearted, by no means old. She had two sons, of eighteen and twenty, and a pretty daughter, recently married to Count Emilio Boccara, a younger brother of Count Boccara; and partly for them, partly perhaps for herself, though she did not say so, she entertained perpetually. During the season before Lent she had given two balls, and several small dances. Now that Lent had begun, and society made a pretence of not dancing, though it still danced whenever and wherever it could, the Duchess gave lunches, concerts, and dinners. And she it was who had made roller-skating once more not merely the vogue, but the passion in Rome. In her magnificent palace there was a long picture gallery, with a ceiling painted by Tiepolo and a marble floor. One day the Duchess, in a moment of inspiration, glanced down at this

floor. Her handsome eyes became fixed and dreamy, then suddenly vivacious and twinkling. She raised her head, clapped her hands—she was still as gay and almost as buoyant as a child—and hurried away to find her secretary. The result of her inspiration was Rome on rollers.

At first, all the smart 'boys' and 'girls' of Rome began to tumble down to the sound of music. Then they began to get up, and their places on the marble floors of the palaces were taken by the young married women and the young men, secretaries of embassy, scions of the great Roman houses, travelling foreigners with good introductions. And now, when Duchess Miravanti gave her fir t evening party for skating on a grand scale, even middle-aged people, the intellectuals, the erudite with beards and reputations, and those who had hitherto been wholly addicted to bridge, were earnestly taking lessons at the Sala Pischetti. A well-known senator had broken his leg only the day before. A beautiful princess, with a face like a muse and a cloud of dense black hair, boasted of possessing two 'housemaid's knees.' Mrs. Tooms—at least she said so—was black and blue, and had to be carefully 'made up' by an expert of the theatre before appearing in public. A royal lady had 'ricked her ankle.' And it was rumoured that Mrs. Paraway, who had lived in Rome to the certain knowledge of various truth-telling persons for the last five-and-forty years, and had certainly been in existence in some other quarter of the globe some thirty years before that, was 'thinking of beginning.'

Rome loves anything that gives a spice of novelty to an entertainment, and the Duchess had therefore decreed that all ladies who intended to skate at her party must appear *en turban*. This command was freely interpreted by various pretty women to mean whatever suited them best. Countess Boccara, for instance, arrived in a close-fitting black velvet gown, cut very low, with two patches, and a sort of Phrygian cap, which looked as if it had strayed from the woods of Theocritus into Maxim's and changed most of its nature there. Her pretty sister-in-law, the Duchess's daughter, had powdered her hair and wore on it a scarlet cap, not unlike Pierrot's, only smaller. A handsome, but discontented-looking, American girl, Miss Phœbe Critchit, who was reported to have three millions of dollars, had managed to

make herself look vaguely Turkish, *une désenchantée échappée du Harem*, as Prince Perreto whispered to Princess Carelli, the mother of Cesare. And 'Munetta,' otherwise Princess Giamarcho, remembering a certain remark about a sphinx, had arranged her silver 'turban' in a manner that recalled memories of the museum at Cairo to those who had been there, and that afforded 'The Tomtit' an opportunity of showing his knowledge by christening her 'Hathor the lady of the underworld.'

The Miravanti Palace was immense, but the Duchess had invited all Rome that was smart, and by eleven o'clock even her great rooms began to look comfortably filled. In March the Roman 'season' is at its height, and Rome is thronged with people of distinction, and people who think themselves so, from all parts of the world. Duchess Miravanti had travelled, and had a wide and cosmopolitan acquaintance. So her parties were really amusing, and in her palace people were able to escape from that small and wearisome round of intimate Roman tittle-tattle, which has given Rome a bad name for gossip, into an atmosphere more vital and invigorating. The Duchess shunned only aggressive bores, vulgar and ill-bred people, oddities, cranks, and those who, by the accident of station, did not happen to be of 'her world.' The rest she genially welcomed, including Mrs. Paraway, who, having misunderstood her invitation, and being under the impression that all the female guests were to put on turbans, appeared in one of prodigious size, to the surprise and horror of the hostess, and the amazed amusement of many of the guests.

'Elle va patiner! Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!' exclaimed the Duchess to her intimate friends as they came in one by one. 'Si elle tombe, c'est fini! Nous aurons un cadavre dans la maison!'

No one needed to ask who was meant by *elle*. The friends of the Duchess flocked towards the picture gallery, eager, it seemed, to be 'in at the death.' On a dais, covered with red cloth, a string band was playing a negro melody with Southern vigour. The scraping noise of the multitude of skates, as they rolled perpetually over the marble, mingled with the music, with the loud buzz of voices and the tinkle of laughter. Rome is become cosmopolis, a strange play-

ground for the nations. To-night the cheery Duchess had provided them with a game that seemed new. Their vigour and their entrain in playing it were evidently a delight to the large company of dowagers, married women who did not care for hard exercises, and men old and otherwise, who sat and stood looking on. Among these were Mrs. Paraway, whom everybody expected—on account of the turban—to set forth presently upon the marble on a short voyage to the other world; Marchesa Verosti; Princess Carelli; Princess Bartoldi, the beautiful Sicilian who held her court at the Grand Hotel; Mrs. Melville Pringle; Madame de Heder; Donna Alice Metardi, and many more. The men numbered Prince Perreto; Count Boccara on the look-out for Mrs. Tooms; a Spanish nobleman called Y Vives, who wrote plays and always seemed steeped in melancholy; the Swedish Minister, and others. Most of the young men were skating, were looking for skates, or were putting on the skates of the women.

Just in front of those who were eagerly watching, under the tall picture of a pope, sat the lovely Princess, who said she had 'housemaid's knees.' Despite her affliction she was going to skate. Her great eyes were sparkling with anticipation, as she stretched one small foot out from beneath her short velvet dress towards an adoring young man, a Neapolitan, who knelt on the marble before her and with muscular and eager brown hands proceeded to fix on her skates. The music made an almost feverish crescendo. A little Polish princess, her hands behind her, her head flung back in a sort of ecstasy of pleasure, went swinging by, taking immense curves with a motion almost like flying.

'Presto! Presto!' cried the lovely princess to the Neapolitan.

Cleverly he sprang up, took her two hands. A movement, and they were gone on the tide of the music. And the nobles looked down on an empty chair.

'Is your Cesare here?' asked Princess Bartoldi of Princess Carelli.

'No,' returned Princess Carelli, in a weary, lack-lustre voice, that yet was not disagreeable. 'But he said he might come. Probably he won't. He seems to go nowhere this year.'

What does he do all the time?'

What does any one do? I never know. He comes in, goes out, sees his friends, I suppose, visits the club, dines and *chi lo sa?* The time passes. What should he do?'

Princess Carelli, perhaps because she was born English, was more Italian than almost any Italian. She spoke English with a strong accent, and made mistakes in the construction of her English sentences. Her movements and poses were Italian. She had introduced an Italian timbre into her voice. She was contemplative, careless, rigid in etiquette with her equals, familiarly at home with her servants, as are Italians. But she was more like the Italian lady who does not travel than like the smart Italian woman who gets all her clothes in Paris, runs over to London in June, and takes the cure at Aix in August. Princess Carelli, when she wanted sea air, visited Viareggio; if she must have a cure went to Salsomaggiore, for an after-cure to the Abetone. She drove in a shut brougham, or a closed motor, seldom or never walked, and was *in casa* every day to her friends after six o'clock. At night she sat up very late. In the morning she existed only for her maid, and for a few very intimate Italian friends, women of course. She was short, very stout, and yet elegant, unsmiling, and managed somehow to look very much darker than she really was. One woman only she disliked in Rome, and that woman was Princess Mancelli.

'When is he going to marry, my dear?' inquired Marchesa Verosti.

'*Chi lo sa?*' returned Princess Carelli, with growing languor. The louder the music, the more rapid the skating, the more weary and detached she managed to look.

'We are all expecting it,' persisted the Marchesa. 'Since—well we are all expecting it.'

'I'm afraid that will not help matters.'

The Princess sighed.

'I should not be surprised if Cesare never married,' she added.

'But every one in Cesare's position marries!' exclaimed the Marchesa. 'The only son, and such a property to inherit!'

'Cesare began life like a fool,' drily observed the Princess. 'Perhaps he thinks he has earned his celibacy.'

'According to Mantegazza——' began an elderly man standing by.

'Don't speak of that old horror to me!' said the Princess, not changing her languid tone. 'He is on my index.'

'And why, if one may ask, Princess?'

'It is he who wrote that *La simpatia è l'unica e vera sorgente dell'amore.* Such a sacrilegious absurdity! And besides, I hate his style.'

'But my dear Adelaida——' began the Marchesa energetically.

'It is only the English who pretend to believe such nonsense, because they want to *ennoble* love, to make it respectable. But we Romans know better.'

'There is the Marmotta down again!'

'Ah! Cecho Arrivamale picking her up—again!'

'I wonder how Maria likes it?'

'Maria is in bed with a cold.'

'How dull!'

The music changed to a cake walk. The musicians made each new thing they played seem like the last, mere rhythm and accent to give an impulse to the skaters. A powdery film flew up from the marble floor, and settled lightly on the hair, the turbans, the gowns and the coats of the flying couples, as they swing monotonously by with linked hands, smiling, talking, or silently looking at one another, joined in the strong sympathy of active pleasure. Louder and ever louder rose the scraping sound under Tiepolo's roof as new skaters joined the throng. The crowd watching at the end of the gallery became more dense, more compact. In other rooms the bridge players were sitting down to the tables.

'Has she ventured?'

The Duchess had left the first drawing-room, and now was anxiously looking with her round and bird-like eyes towards the skaters.

'No, no, she is there, by the American ambassadress.'

The Duchess breathed a sigh of relief. She perceived the large green turban of Mrs. Paraway nodding violently as she talked to a handsome fair woman covered with jewels, who was serenely smiling and looking on.

'She clings to life after all. It is a natural instinct. But I wish she would take off her turban, dear soul. Then I should know she had resolved not to die in my house.'

The Duchess turned and saw a tall, dark and delicate-looking man coming slowly towards her. She welcomed him with the genuine warmth which made her such a popular hostess.

'Mr. Verrall! How glad I am! When did you arrive in Rome?'

'Only yesterday. I found your kind card at the Embassy.'

'I must present you to all the nice people. Tiens! There is Lady Cannynge coming in! Do you know her?'

'Not at all.'

'I will present you.' The Duchess lowered her voice. 'Her husband was the great friend of poor Denzil, your predecessor. He is guardian to the children, I believe, and is looking after them all. One never sees him anywhere. Maintenant il est bon père de famille.'

Although she spoke excellent English she often broke into French.

'That was a very sad business,' said Mr. Verrall, sympathetically.

'Mr. Verrall, the new Counsellor at your Embassy—Lady Cannynge,' said the Duchess. 'I am glad you are *en turban* and mean to skate.'

And she turned away to greet the Princess Manelli, who came up alone, not wearing a turban.

Eric Verrall, who—as became an ambitious diplomat—was a keen observer, saw, or in that first moment believed he saw, in Lady Cannynge a gay and perhaps brilliant woman of the world. The rose-colour in her hair emphasised the darkness of her eyes, which looked to the diplomat almost malicious. The lips had the slight suggestion of hardness which comes to the lips of so many women who are much in contact with social life, a hardness which implies a soul on the defensive, a heart that has learnt to be wary of ambush. A light irony flickered surely on this face. And yet—the diplomat began to realise that malice and irony could not be natural expressions of the tall, slim, and still almost girlish woman who stood before him. They

spoke for a moment of Rome, of the skating. Then Verrall said :

'My coming here must give pain to some people I 'm afraid.'

'Why ?' asked Lady Cannynge, with a slight lift of her eyebrows.

'My predecessor was such a good fellow, I have heard, and had staunch friends here.'

'Oh—yes. But you cannot suppose any one will be prejudiced against you on that account.'

'Prejudices have their roots in strange ground. Will you be kind and tell me where Mrs. Denzil lives ? She will be the first person on whom I shall leave a card, with an expression of my sympathy.'

'You will have to go out to Frascati.'

'She has left Rome ?'

'Yes. She is living at Frascati with her mother. But one can get there in twenty minutes with a good motor. What did we all do without motors ? They have annihilated space. Frascati is practically Rome now, which is, of course, delightful for the people who live at Frascati. How lovely the view is from the height above Tusculum. You have never seen it ?'

'No.'

'You must. My husband thinks it one of *the* views of the world. I am going to skate. Do come and see us. We are in the Palazzo Barberini.'

A young Italian spoke to her. People came up. Verrall saw her dark and graceful head, crowned with the cleverly arranged twists of bright rose-colour, moving towards the music and the scraping sound of the skates, her lips smiling as she talked to her companion or to the many who greeted her on her way.

'Surely,' he thought, 'I heard that Denzil was operated upon, and died, in her apartment. It was in the Barberini, I know.'

There came to him, as more than once there had come to him before, a sensation of unpleasant wonder at what seemed the hardness inherent in many, perhaps in most, women.

'And why, in Heaven's name, do we need softness in them ?' he asked himself, 'always softness !'

'Mr. Verrall, let me present you to Princess Manelli.'

The Duchess was hospitably determined that the newcomer should not pass a dull evening.

Meanwhile Dolores was joining the skaters.

For a fortnight after the death of Denzil she had gone nowhere. She had attended the quiet funeral in the Protestant cemetery outside Rome, where pilgrims go to stand at the foot of the sad poet's grave. She had seen the sun shining through the cypress trees upon the three small children dressed in black, and, with tears, she had asked herself whether ever again she would have faith and courage enough to pray to the mysterious God. She had remembered the words of a collect: 'O God, who declared Thy Almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity,' and she had repeated them mentally again and again. 'Are they true? Are they true?' she had said to herself. And she had seen the sun shining through the cypress trees upon those three little children dressed in black, upon the mother who stood beside them, holding tightly the hand of the tiniest. She had heard the dry sound of earth falling on the lid of the box which contained Francis Denzil—or his body. Which? That hideous question had come to her then.

And now, with rose-colour in her hair, she was going towards the Duchess's picture gallery to skate under the painted eyes of dead popes to the sound of a cake walk.

How had she come to it? She knew, and yet sometimes it seemed to her as if she did not really know. And afterwards trying to look back, not only on the few days between Denzil's funeral and the Duchess's skating party, but on the many days that followed them, she said to herself, 'I don't know. We never really know.'

For a fortnight few had seen her, and no one in the social world. Then she had reappeared at a dinner given by the Countess Boccara, to which Sir Theodore had been asked but had not been able to come.

'Theo 's in England,' she had said, in reply to inquiries. 'He had some business in London.'

That seemed natural enough. Dolores did not say that Sir Theodore was in London on a dead man's business. Two or three people began to speak to her of the sad happenings in her apartment. They did not continue. There had

been an expression in her eyes which had stopped them. It was repellent. It was like the decisive shutting of a door.

'She does not care to talk of it,' people said.

But they did not understand why she did not care to talk of it.

'She's an odd sort of a woman,' one or two of them added.

And indeed from this time the feeling grew up and spread in the Rome that knew, or knew of Dolores, that she was 'an odd sort of a woman.'

Sir Theodore had returned from London two days after the Countess Boccara's dinner, and from that time it was an understood thing that he would take no part in the season.

'Theo's not going anywhere,' Dolores said. 'And we shall not do any more entertaining this spring.'

She did not add any reason, but every one of course understood.

This was a mark of respect to Denzil's memory. That Lady Cannynge went out was also understood. It would be very odd for a woman to give everything up on account of the death of a man who stood in no relationship to her. Good feeling and etiquette were both satisfied. And Dolores was made much of by every one. The Romans felt that she had passed through a sad time, and must be petted and helped to forget it. Romans can be very staunch friends. Dolores was liked, and now her general liking was markedly shown.

She seemed to respond, and almost with ardour, displaying social qualities more vigorous, more brilliant, more determined than any she had shown before.

'It's a pity,' the little Boccara remarked. 'Dolores Cannynge is coming out of her genre. I told her long ago what it was. Every woman who isn't a fool should know what her genre is, and remain in it.'

The little Boccara was not in the best of humours. For she was—secretly, or so she thought—coming out of her own genre. She was beginning to be jealous of her husband with Mrs. Tooms. Mrs. Tooms was certainly the plainest of all the ladies whom Nino believed himself to have loved.

This was, perhaps, the reason why the Countess began to be jealous. And Nino had ceased from talking to his wife about Mrs. Tooms. His reticence was a symptom which made all the Frenchwoman bristle. Even the diminishing size of her waist ceased from occupying her mind exclusively, and she began to hate Mrs. Tooms, although she believed that the American was 'ridiculously respectable.' Indeed, if Mrs. Tooms had been wicked Countess Boccara would have been less jealous of her. The Countess knew this, but she did not know why it was.

When she left Verrall Dolores went into a corridor that ran parallel with the picture gallery and sat down on a long settee, while the young Italian who had accompanied her, Marchese Alarini, hurried off into the hall to find her a pair of skates. For the moment there was no one in this corridor. Every one who meant to skate was already skating. The bridge players had made up their tables. Those who loved quiet conversation were scattered through the long series of immense drawing-rooms, or were standing before the buffet. The rest of the crowd were watching the skaters, who used the corridor as a promenade when the band was silent. Alarini did not come back immediately as Dolores had expected. She leaned back and fidgeted with her fan.

'Who declarest Thy Almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity.'

Why should those words recur to her mind now?

The noise of the multitudes of skates on the marble was very loud in her ears. It gave her an impression of violence rather than of pleasure. She imagined the skaters, whose voices she could hear breaking in disjointedly upon the heavily accented music, turning perpetually upon their steps, covering perpetually the same ground, joyously advancing only to retreat. Their buoyant movements suggested a setting out on some glorious journey to an enticing unknown. But at the end of the gallery there were only gossiping dowagers, staring and commenting men. And there the skaters must turn and come just as buoyantly back. She heard a fearful scrape, almost like a cry, and a crash. Some one—two or three people perhaps—had certainly fallen. But the music did not stop for a moment. And the violinists

seemed to dwell more heavily on the accents like tired people leaning. She wondered why she had come. She did not want to skate. But she would skate, and already she skated well. And perhaps later she would play bridge. She had improved wonderfully in her play every one said. There was soon to be a very smart bridge tournament in one of the palaces. She was going in for it. She often played in the afternoon now. Perhaps she would win if she drew a good partner. The woman's prize was a jewel. It would be a triumph to win that jewel.

She sighed and looked down at her fan, turning it slowly round and round in her hands. In a moment, while she made this useless movement and as uselessly watched it, she knew that some one was looking at her intently. She did not look up. She asked herself who it was. And the answer came at once, 'It is Cesare Carelli.' The quiet knowledge of a not unimportant fact was within her. She looked up and met Carelli's eyes. And immediately she knew the fact was not unimportant. There was steady intention expressed in those black eyes. Though it died out, or retreated instantly as she looked up, so swiftly indeed that the disappearance almost coincided with the slight lifting of her head, Dolores had perceived it as certainly as she would have perceived a great and obstinate figure which planted itself in her path. That the figure stepped swiftly aside, vanished in forest depths, could not alter the fact of its appearance before her, or the impression it left with her.

Cesare held in his left hand two pairs of skates. When Dolores looked up he came towards her, smiling.

'Why are you all alone, Lady Connynge?' he asked.

He bent, took her hand, lifted it to his lips, and with these lips touched it. Dolores felt his firm mouth through her glove.

'I am waiting for Emilio Alarini. He has gone to get my skates.'

'I saw him hunting for something in a distant hall. But these are the last two pairs.'

He held up the four skates, which knocked together with a dry little sound.

'Did you tell him?'

'No. He did not tell me what he was searching for. It might be anything.'

'Don't you think you ought to go now and let him know, poor boy?'

Her face had changed. She was smiling, and looked gay and rather ironical.

'Emilio is very determined. He has been at Oxford, you know, and has grafted the cold fixity of purpose of the Englishman upon the mercurial energy of the Northern Italian. It would be a pity to stop up the channel in which his energy is flowing. Besides, *chi lo sa*, he may commit an act of brigandage. Let me put on your skates.'

'Are they for me?'

'Of course.'

He knelt down before her.

'Whom were they for?' Dolores asked.

She had not stretched out a foot. Cesare on one knee, his strong, broad-chested and hollow-backed body leaning away from her as he looked into her face with his unselfconscious eyes, paused before he replied:

'I saw there were only two pairs left. I thought it wise to take both. One never knows how soon an emergency may arise. And here it is already.'

'Well then——'

She stretched out her left foot. He took it gently in his hand and drew it down into one of the skates. While he did this he was silent. So long as he was touching Dolores he was silent, and so was she. Afterwards she thought of that. At the moment this mutual silence was instinctive. When both skates were on he got up, and sat beside her on the settee to put on his. And immediately they began to talk.

'Do you care for this rage?' he said, as he threw one leg across his knee, and bent sideways to fasten a skate.

'It is a good exercise and it gives us all something to do.'

'Yes.'

He put his foot down sharply, and tried the skate on the floor.

'But there is something awfully artificial about it,' he continued, beginning to attend to the other skate. 'Skating

by electric light between popes and cardinals on mosaic floors under Tiepolo ceilings!'

He tried the other skate, pushing his foot to and fro.

'We are incongruous here in Rome. But no one seems to notice it. And I suppose it would be ridiculous to try to live up to our palaces. I feel more at my ease in the open air. I often wonder'—he looked into her face, which always had in it something exotic—'whether any woman can care for being out in the open as a man can. I don't suppose it is possible.'

'Perhaps you don't wish it to be possible.'

Although they were sitting with their skates on, and felt unnatural, as the skater does when not in movement, or poised, neither seemed inclined to join the crowd in the gallery just behind them.

'Why not?'

'I think men hug the idea that they have powers of enjoyment which we don't possess.'

'Which do you think enjoy life most, men or women?'

'Men.'

'I expect you are right. I should hate to be a woman.'

The apparent calmness with which Carelli made that statement filled Dolores with a sudden irritation.

'Why?' she asked, with a hint of sharpness.

'Probably because I can't imagine what it is like,' he answered gently, and smiling as if at himself. 'I have not enough imagination. And all my instinct is against what I suppose appeals to women.'

'And what is that?' said Dolores, disarmed and with genuine curiosity.

He turned a little more towards her.

'Don't you want to be protected——'

'I?'

'Women, I mean, to be watched over, waited on, to be given things?'

'Perhaps we do.'

'I want to take things for myself. I should hate to be protected, waited on, except by a servant. I should hate to be looked after. My idea of life is freedom, and I don't think women are ever free. Besides, I don't even think

they ought to be. It seems to me against the nature of things for a woman to be quite free.'

The irritation of Dolores had quite died away.

'I dare say you are right,' she said. 'I don't believe we ever long for freedom merely as an ideal state, as I suppose men do. We may long to be free from some particular thing, or person. But there it ends. Complete freedom would seem to me a very lonely condition, I think.'

For a moment her eyes rested on him with an expression of contemplation that was searching and almost profound.

'And even for a man like you,' she added.

At this moment with a loud chord the music stopped, and people began to hobble into the corridor, laughing, talking, stumbling, touching the walls, being helped along. Many sat down with an abruptness that had nothing of grace. Some hurried away, lifting high their feet and taking short steps, in search of refreshments.

'How absurd we all look!' said Dolores.

Her face had broken up into smiles. She nodded to several of the skaters. Countess Bevcara passed by, stepping daintily, and holding on to a tall young Frenchman. She was a very bad skater, and hated it, but she wished to be in the fashion. When she had gone by, as if suddenly attracted by something, she turned her head, and, looking back, saw Dolores and Carelli. Still holding fast to the young Frenchman, who was fair, neat, manicured, and slightly overdressed, and who held his head a little on one side in a way that displeased other men, she said:

'Dolores!' (she had taken to calling Lady Cannynge by her Christian name) 'how late you are! Have you only just put on your skates? Do stand still, Jules!'

'Yes.'

'Did you hear that crash just now? Cesare, I want to speak to you presently. Did you? Don't forget, Cesare.'

'Yes. Who was it?'

'Mrs. Toone and Nino. They say she has made a dent in the marble. Jules, if you don't stand still——' Her feet shot out and for a moment she presented herself to the company almost in the form of an arch. But though no skater, she was as lithe as a monkey and made a clever recovery.

'A new figure! No one can do it but me!' she said,

standing suddenly rigid. 'Are you going to play in the tournament, Dolores?'

'I believe so. Are you?'

'Of course. The Grand Duke insists on my being his partner. "Such a bore! He plays like a royalty. Tous ces Grands Ducs m'ennuient tellement!" By the way is it really true that you are going to spend all the summer near Rome?'

'The summer! Of course not. We always go away in the summer. What could make you think so?'

'I heard Sir Theodore was perpetually at Frascati trying to find a villa.'

'Absurd! We are going to England for the summer.'

'I felt sure it was a *potin*. I said I was certain Sir Theodore didn't go to Frascati twice in the year. It's the sort of place where Nino retires with Mrs. Toomis to spend a quiet hour gazing at the tiresome old dome of St. Paul's—or do I mean St. Peter's? Help me, Jules! Ah! Marcantonio, take my other arm.'

She stepped carefully away, talking rapidly to the two young men, and glancing about her for admirers.

'How pretty she is!' Dolores said, looking at
'That lovely red hair.'

'Certainly she is pretty,' Cesare answered.

Their eyes met for an instant, and Dolores felt certain that the same thought had passed simultaneously through both their minds. Emilio Alarini came hurrying up with a pair of skates in his hand. He looked angry but as if he were trying not to show his vexation.

'Impossible to find two pairs!' he exclaimed in a gruff but boyish voice. 'I managed at last'—his eyes went to the feet of Dolores. 'You've got a pair! You've been skating.'

'I haven't begun yet. Now it's all right. We shall each have a pair.'

'But'—he stared hard at Cesare, who met his fiery, boyish glance with the calm and determined eyes of a man who was not accustomed to yield to other men.

The orchestra began to play once more. And it played the Barcarolle from the *Contes d'Hoffman*, which that season was the best beloved tune of smart Rome. Instinc-

tively Dolores turned her head. Cesare fixed his eyes on the curve of her long white neck. How almost exaggeratedly feminine it was! He had known, he had been something like the prey of, a passionate woman for many years. Yet as he looked at Dolores he felt like the man who has never entered the secret garden in which woman reveals to her appointed companion the foundation truth of life.

'Then, shall I put on my skates?' almost stammered young Alarini, still looking out of the tail of his eye at Carelli.

'Of course.'

Alarini shot a defiant glance at Cesare, and sat quickly down.

'I won't be a minute.'

Cesare stood up and held out his hand to Dolores.

'It's difficult getting up. Let me help you.'

She glanced up at him, but did not immediately put her hand in his. Alarini almost furiously buckled on a skate. Cesare looked steadily down at Dolores. She gave him her hand.

'Oh, but Lady Cannynge!' exclaimed Alarini.

He was bent over one foot. His forehead was flushed below his thick and shining black hair, which shone almost like a varnished boot. His hands worked quickly, but no longer efficiently, on the other skate.

'Come and find me presently. I want to skate with you. You skate so well,' Dolores said to him with gentle kindness. 'I shall be in the gallery.'

'Oh, thank you!' But—

She turned and, looking almost unnaturally slim and tall raised up on her skates, she stepped slowly away helped by Carelli.

'Damn!' muttered Alarini to himself.

He had the manners for things English, and this utterance of an English bad word somewhat relieved his mind. But he longed to challenge Cesare to a duel. And at the same time he suddenly admired him immensely, and wished he were his friend. What conquerors of women they would be!

As Dolores stepped into the gallery she felt very unhappy because she had yielded to Cesare's wish that she should skate first with him. Not that such a trifle mattered! And yet

she could not help feeling that it did matter very much, because it was a symptom of character. Even now there was time. She need not begin to skate. But she would begin. She knew that. She could not possibly help beginning. And Carelli gave her his hand, and, exchanging their careful stepping movement for the swinging *élan* that is a joy to healthy bodies, they struck out together over the smooth marble.

Not many people as yet had returned to the gallery. But the little Polish princess was already there, and as usual was skating alone. She was almost a child, not tall, softly rounded, plump, with a face like a joyous and very intelligent baby. And, to her, skating was just an ecstasy. She gave herself to it with a complete abandon that was almost startling. Never would she hold any one's hand. She could not bear to be fettered, and she knew that no one in Rome could skate as she did. Half-smiling, with her little round head, thickly covered with strong brown hair, thrown back, she shot out in a great curve to the left, in a great curve to the right, as if she saw before her the shining ice-tracks of a virgin world. Marble, cardinals, popes, princes, Tiepolo ceilings, they did not exist for her. Her bright eyes were nearly closed. Their light seemed directed inward. Dolores and Cesare followed her and kept their eyes upon her, and almost immediately Dolores lost her feeling of unhappiness. It was as if she emerged from a black room. But the door remained open behind her. And she was aware of that, and knew that she would presently return to the room.

Meanwhile, however, she was out of it, and holding Cesare's strong hand she followed the little princess.

Among those who were gathered at the end of the gallery were the Princess Manelli and the new Councillor of the British Embassy. Mr. Verrall had heard of the Princess as one of the leaders of Rome. He thought it would be to his advantage if he made a good impression upon her. She might 'put him up to the ropes' if she chose. And he found her very agreeable. He knew nothing of her long connection with Cesare Carelli, and now, as the music began again, he said to her:

'How well Lady Cannynge skates! Can you tell me who that man is with her?'

'His name is Carelli, Cesare Carelli. That is his mother sitting over there by Princess Bartoldi. She is talking to a big old man, do you see?'

'Yes. I remember now I have heard of them. The Princess is English.'

'Was English.'

Verrill looked interrogative.

'She is far more Italian now than any of us,' said the Princess with a light irony. 'But it is a case of the Protestant converted to the Catholic Church. You know what I mean by that, of course?'

'Perfectly. And the son!'

Dolores and Cesare swept by, turned, and went away with a rush in the gathering crowd of the skaters.

'Cesare?' said the Princess, with an easy familiarity in which there was not a hint of embarrassment. 'He is a *bon enfant*. Not very much in him, perhaps, but thoroughly *bon enfant*. Men like him, I believe. Lady Cannynge is a charming creature.'

'I should think, very.'

'And she is coming out wonderfully.'

'In what way exactly do you mean, Princess?'

'Well, she was always delicious. But she was rather like an exotic flower that had a secret desire to lie in hiding. She was very reserved, I think, in a sort of gentle, mysterious way. But now she is more resolute, more definitely *femme du monde*. She shows more marked social qualities than she used to. Look how she skates. And she's developing into a capital bridge player too. She's altogether more brilliant lately. Even in the last few weeks she seems to have come on in an extraordinary way. She may become quite a leader of the younger cosmopolitan set if she likes, I should think. But this season unfortunately she can't entertain on account of her husband.'

'That tragic business of my predecessor?'

'Yes. It seems that Sir Theodore was very devoted to his friend, and that as the death took place actually in his apartment he resolved to close it for the season to all gaieties. Lady Cannynge receives of course, but only in a very small way, and never at night.'

'I understand Sir Theodore Cannynge's feeling.'

Yes, of course. So Lady Cannynge comes out to amuse herself.'

Again Verrall thought of the hardness of women. He did not, however, think the Princess Mancelli hard. Somehow she had managed to convey to him an impression that she agreed with his secret feeling, that she, too, was wondering a little at, if not actually condemning Lady Cannynge.

'It was a very sad affair,' the Princess added. 'There are three small children, and they seemed a very united family. Indeed I'm afraid we used to make it almost a reproach to Mr. Denzil in Rome that he was too domestic. You see in diplomacy, — —'

'Yes, I know what you mean.'

And they drifted into a conversation in which they were both very much at their ease. For Verrall was devoted to his profession, and Princess Mancelli could have been the perfect wife to a great diplomat.

'I must skate with Alarini now,' said Dolores to Cesare. 'He is standing in the doorway, and looking as if I had done him a deadly wrong.'

Immediately Cesare began to skate more slowly.

'Do you want me to stop by him?' he asked.

'Oh no. Leave me somewhere and he will come to me.'

'Among the dowagers?'

'Why not?'

'I will take you to my mother.'

At that moment Cesare's voice sounded exactly as if it were smiling. But when he spoke again the smile was certainly gone.

'You remember our conversation about freedom?' he said.

'Yes.'

'I think perhaps I gave you a wrong impression.'

She turned her eyes towards his. And again she saw in his the steady intention that was almost like a great and obstinate figure standing in her path. This time, however, it did not retreat.

'I told you I loved freedom. But I am not free. And I don't even wish to be free. I will go and tell Alarini.'

He left Dolores by his mother.

Cesare might be *bon enfant*, as Princess Mancelli affirmed,

but he had a good deal of the astuteness, by some called cunning, which belongs to most Italians.

And so he left Lady Cannynge beside his mother.

CHAPTER XVII

On the night of Duchess Miravanti's skating party Princess Mancelli knew that Cesare loved Dolores Cannynge. She could have given no good reason for her knowledge, perhaps indeed no reason at all. Months ago Montebruno had told her that it was so. She had neither believed nor had she doubted him. His statement had hardly affected her. She would not take a man's word in such a matter. "If it is so I shall see for myself." Such had been her thought. Since then two or three times she had seen Cesare with, or not far from, Lady Cannynge. They were together at the Countess Boccara's dinner and the Grand Hotel. Their other meetings had been equally fortuitous. At the Grand Hotel, when Schizzi was playing, the Princess had become aware that Cesare admired Lady Cannynge very much. She had seen a strong admiration in his eyes. But she knew young Italians very well. A good dinner, a glass or two of champagne, Schizzi's way of performing, and the nearest pretty andyoung woman ought surely—the Princess had told herself—have called up that expression in Cesare. Who knew as well as she what responses to sensual influences there were in Cesare's nature? Perhaps she had been anxious to trick herself, although she was a woman not at all given to self-trickery. But now that she had seen Lady Cannynge and Cesare joined together in an exercise the Princess had no longer any doubts. Had they only made one round of the Duchess's picture gallery she would have been certain. Not just like that could Cesare have skated with any woman he did not love. Not just like that could he have held her hand, not just like that have been on the alert to respond to her movements, to protect her from any chance of collision,

to support her, firm but not iron-handed, if she slipped. There was nothing in Cesare's face to tell the Princess. He had the self-command of the well-bred, and never shy Italian. His body had told her, and how she herself could not have said. Montebruno had either been right, or he had somehow anticipated a coming fact. She knew, and probably she was the only person in all Rome who knew. For Montebruno had gone away again to gamble at Monte Carlo. And as to Dolores Cannynge—well, the Princess did not feel sure of her knowledge.

That was absurd perhaps. 'A woman always knows such a thing.'

Nevertheless—after saying that to herself—the Princess still did not feel sure about Lady Cannynge.

A woman does not always know such a thing. The Princess was clever enough to distrust *clichés*, and to realise that very pure women, as if by reason of their virtue, sometimes have to forego certain mental privileges supposed to belong to the whole sex.

As she drove home to the Palazzo Urbino the Princess hated a man, and that man was Sir Theodore Cannynge. She had not the feminine joy of being able to think him a fool, for she supposed him in love with, and happy in the company of, Edna Denzil. The little Boccara, whose sudden jealousy of her husband and Mrs. Toons seemed to have soured her whole nature, had abruptly become hostile to 'the most beautiful person in Rome.' The petting Dolores had received at the hands of Rome—sympathetic since the death of Francis Denzil—and the sudden vigour and success with which she had responded, showing social qualities which were decisive, as well as those which were merely graceful and charming, had quite changed Countess Boccara's feelings towards her. She had felt almost fond of the Dolores who was really indifferent to social success. But a challenging woman, a woman who cared to succeed, would find in her an instinctive enemy.

Countess Boccara, who heard of every trifle connected with the doings of society in Rome, and of the people she thought smart enough to know, had discovered that since the return of Sir Theodore from England he motored out perpetually to Frascati. 'Twice and three times a day,'

ome one had said. And the Countess had sent this piece of news on its travels through Rome, with a small addition of her own, that Sir Theodore meant to spend the summer at Frascati, and was trying to rent one of the big villas with gardens there: 'Why, no one knows!' She had spoken of it to Princess Manelli, who had shown no interest, and had merely replied: 'Frascati is not at all bad after the middle of September, and even in the height of summer it would be quite bearable in Villa Aldobrandini, or Villa Lancellotti.'

'I doubt if Dolores will like the idea,' the Countess had said, with meaning.

And to this Princess Manelli had answered nothing at all. She had understood that for some reason Countess Boccara was rejoicing over the supposed humiliation of one whom she called her friend, and had felt a faint contempt, as she often did for certain feminine qualities.

Now as she drove home through the dark and narrow streets to Palazzo Urbino she remembered Countess Boccara's words, and she hated Sir Theodore. For she still believed that Dolores loved him.

'Always at Frascati!' What worse than fools men were! As the carriage turned in at the gate of the drive, and mounted the short hill to the arcade of the palace, the Princess felt the hot blood stir round her heart. She burned with the desire to be able to rule Sir Theodore, to be able to order his goings out and his comings in. As she got out it seemed to her that she saw a travelling cloud of white dust moving swiftly across the Campagna. And it was the companion of a motor that was rushing to Frascati.

She went slowly up the great staircase, with her gown trailing behind her. She was aware that the sense and the terror of loneliness had grown within her, that to-night they were almost unbearable. Her heart sank as she stood by the great door which led into her apartment, and thought of the empty rooms beyond. 'No woman is meant to live alone,' she thought. The door was opened and she passed in.

'Cesare loves Lady Cannynge.'

Her maid, an elderly, corrugated, and broad-bosomed Italian, who had been with her since she was a child, and who lived respectfully, devotedly, and intimately in her life, took away her wrap.

'In a few minutes, Nanna—Nannina,' she said.

'Eccellenza, si!'

'Don't call me Eccellenza—to-night, the Princess exclaimed.

'Ma——'

The Princess put her cheek against the wrinkled temple of Nanna.

'I 'll come almost directly, I won't keep you up long.'

Nanna went away, shaking her head. She had no real moral sense but that of love. In her eyes her princess stood above and apart from all other living creatures. No such thing as vice could be in her princess. She bitterly resented the defection of the 'Principino.' And yet she was thoroughly respectable, very devout, and strictly moral in her own behaviour. She was even extremely severe on any lapse among persons in her own class of life. 'People shouldn't do such things!' was a favourite saying, and often on her lips. Personal devotion destroyed in her all reason. Love made such havoc of propriety in Nanna that she had repeatedly besieged the Madonna with prayers for the return to her princess of the 'Principino.'

When Nanna was gone, Princess Manelli sat down on one of the immense sofas in the room where she had talked one day with Dolores. How horribly large and lonely it seemed to-night, and how silent! And loneliness was before her in the long and dark hours of the night. She was sick at heart. But something else was sick within her—her pride.

Again and again she saw the two sleepers pass before her. She saw the body of Cesare which in some strange and subtle way had told her a dreadful truth. She heard the pretty Barcarolle from *Contes d'Hoffman*. To her—for she was very Italian in most of her tastes—it seemed expressive of sentiment, even of the languors of genuine passion. It made scenes rise up before her.

Was Dolores Cannynge *une petite chatte*? The Princess had wondered. But no, she did not really believe it. It was strange that Dolores almost attracted her, that when she looked at Dolores she was nearly always conscious of a feeling of pity, such as one may feel for a child who is destined to sorrow. There was something grotesque in the idea

of her pitying Dolores Cannynge. What must be Dolores Cannynge's feeling for her?

Through all these months the Princess had been holding in quiescence the turbulent depths of her nature. She had been making a powerful and continuous effort. At the end of her liaison with Cesare Carelli there had been terrible scenes. The Princess had not allowed her lover to go without desperate efforts to keep him. Afterwards she knew that she had humbled herself to the dust. But at the time she had acted instinctively, had given the reins to her nature, had been careless of everything before Cesare. She had been like a mad creature and she had not scrupled to let him know it. If, when he finally left her, he had gone to another woman the Princess might have committed an act of violence. And she knew it. But he had not done that. He had simply chosen to resume his complete freedom. He had realised that he was in servitude, and he had had the cold strength to break out of it. The Princess and he had measured their wills, and Cesare had conquered.

Since that triumph the Princess had secretly loved Cesare more passionately, and differently. She had loved him as one over whom for years she had dominion, but who now had dominion over her. She knew that now she was in soul Cesare's creature, in soul the creature of a man who loved another woman.

All these months she had held herself in. When the rupture was an accomplished fact, when she had no more hope, then she had returned to herself, had summoned the pride she had flung to the winds, had tried to entrench herself in it. She had gone off alone to Switzerland, had joined a party of French friends, had kept herself well *en vue*. She had, as it were, run up the flag to the masthead.

And ever since she had kept it flying. She had braved the pity of Rome. And not one woman had been let into her confidence. Not one woman had been allowed to see anything of what she was feeling—unless it were Dolores on that day just before Pacci came. Then, perhaps, by accident, for a moment the Princess had shown a shadow of the truth, when she spoke about bridge. But she had doubted at the time, and doubted now, whether Lady Cannynge had

hought anything of it. All these months she had held herself in. But—now?

While she had been standing with the new Councillor of the British Embassy, and talking gaily about diplomacy, she had for a moment envisaged a future in which she might be as she had never been, might act as she had never thought to act. She envisaged that future now as she sat alone, forgetful of Nanna, who in the big bedroom close by was getting things ready for the night, and muttering malediction against the 'Principino.'

If Sir Theodore Cannynge continued going to Frascati, and if Dolores Cannynge changed—what then?

Changed! Princess Mancelli, like all women who succeed in her world, was a keen reader of character, an instinctive psychologist. Her conclusions about people were rapidly come to, and were seldom proved wrong. But Dolores remained oddly mysterious to her. Perhaps the truth was that the Princess was puzzled, even baffled, by the natural sincerity and innocence which belonged to Dolores, and which sometimes had troubled, even almost angered Dolores herself, because they had sometimes made her feel painfully apart from the world she generally moved in. Now and then the Princess was on the edge of divining this nature, then again she said to herself, 'It's impossible. We women aren't like that, cannot remain like that, in our way of life.' And she feared to be what she called *jouée* by Dolores. It was so dangerous to believe in any one.

The rupture with Cesare had made Princess Mancelli secretly uncertain of herself, and not only with men but also with women. It had struck a deadly blow at her self-esteem, and, so, had weakened her. For she was not one to build a temple on the ruined foundations of a house that had been dedicated to secret pleasures. She no longer trusted her intellect, because she had ceased to trust her heart. How Cesare's desertion had weakened her! She wished she knew how to hate him.

Nanna looked round the door with the eyes of a sorceress, yet anxiously. The Princess did not hear her, but felt that she was there. Nanna, and all she would do, were the prelude to the long hours of the lonely night.

When the Princess got up from the sofa, and turned round,

Nanna was quite alarmed by her pallor, the expression of misery about her eyes, and the exhaustion in her movements.

'Ma—donna!' Nanna said, laying an almost terrified stress upon the first syllable.

She hurried forward, with her respectful gait.

'Poveretta!' she almost bleated. 'You are too tired!'

'Yes, Nannina, I am very tired to-night,' said the Princess. She longed to cry. But she knew too well what crying would mean for her; a tempestuous outburst in which rage would be mingled with sorrow. And she did not dare to cry.

'How I hate all these parties! How I hate them!' she said, when she was in the bedroom.

'But it is there you go to take your pleasure!' protested Nanna. 'And what would they do in Rome without my Principessa?'

'Nobody wants me! Nobody wants me!' the Princess answered.

Again she saw the skaters pass by. The tears rushed into her eyes.

'Make haste, Nanna!' she said. 'All these horrible silly things!'

She threw her jewels down almost violently on the dressing-table.

'Leave them—put them away to-morrow.'

'Ma Eccellenza . . .'

'To-morrow—to-morrow! Turn out the light, quickly.'

As Nanna went off to her bed she was in a state of strong agitation. She envied the Principino. Whom could he ever find equal to her Principessa? She resolved to make one last attempt to soften the heart of the Madonna. Perhaps she, Nanna, had not put forward the sadness of her mistress with sufficient detail, sufficient eloquence. She lifted her heavily veined and big-jointed hand, signed herself, and made a vow to try once more. One never knew!

In the morning the Princess wrote to Montebruno who was staying in lodgings in Nice.

The connection between the Princess and Montebruno was a not unusual one in Italy, but in one respect it was exceptional. The Montebruno family were, it might almost be said, hereditary friends of the family of Torquemara to

which the Princess belonged. For more years than most Romans could remember Torquemaras and Montebrunos had stood by each other, and stood up for each other, sometimes against all reason, sometimes even against all right.

'They are our friends!' That was considered by either family to be an all-sufficient reply to any charge, however well-founded, against the other. And individuals were covered by a similar cloak of charity. The father of the Princess, Prince Torquemara, a man of the strictest rectitude, put his principles in his pocket without hesitation for the sake of a Montebruno. On one occasion Enrico Montebruno, a cousin of Giorgio, the Princess's ally, who had behaved abominably in a money matter, had cheated his wife's family, and had been publicly exposed in a resounding *processo*, presented himself at Prince Torquemara's palace when the Prince was giving a luncheon party. All Rome had cut him owing to his disgraceful conduct. But the Prince, as soon as the name was announced, ordered another place to be laid at the table, and received the unexpected visitor with perfect cordiality. An Englishman of high rank who was present, a near relation of Princess Torquemara, afterwards ventured to express his amazement that a swindler was made welcome in Palazzo Torquemara.

'We know nothing about that,' was the Prince's reply. 'He is a Montebruno and our friend.'

Thus any Montebruno was likely to be a friend of Princess Manelli. But there was another reason, a more strange and romantic one, for the intimacy between her and this ruined gambler.

Montebruno, who now looked as if no gentle feeling of humanity could ever have been housed in his bosom, had had a passion for Princess Manelli. It had been the only passion of his life except the mania for play. The Princess had not returned it, and had never permitted Montebruno to hope for any return. Although not a woman of any high moral sense she was a woman who knew how to respect her own power of loving. Apart from her husband Cesare Carelli was the only man who had been intimately in her life. But she had known how to keep Montebruno by her refusal. Egotist, cynic, pitilessly selfish though he was, and concentrated on that driest and most unamiable of all

the vices—the passion for gaining money without giving anything in return—he had a hidden shrine. And in it was cherished a curious devotion for Princess Mancelli. He was the Princess's confidante. He had stood aside and, not unchivalrously, had been patient during the years of her love for Cesare. If he were jealous he had not shown it. When that connection ended in disaster for the Princess, only he had known the despair and the fury that consumed her. And it was then, when Cesare left her, that Montebruno awoke to a sort of slow burning hatred of Cesare. He did not show it. He seldom, or never, showed any real feeling. And Cesare had no suspicion of it. But it would have been a satisfaction to Montebruno to kill in a duel the man who had dared to break away from Lisetta Mancelli. Such a rejection seemed to leave a scar—was it on his pride, or on the curious, but implacable affection that had succeeded his passion?

The Princess relied on this affection more than she was even aware. It was like a cold rock to which she could cling, and which she knew would never crumble. She trusted Montebruno as she trusted no other human being, unless it were perhaps poor old Nanna with her petitions to the Madonna.

In this friendship there were strange reciprocities. Two prides had melted in the dull glow of its embers. By its light two passions had been disclosed in their nakedness. Montebruno knew all that the Princess had suffered from her love for Cesare. The Princess knew all the misery brought upon Montebruno by his insatiable mania for the tables. So deep did her knowledge penetrate, so completely had Montebruno's pride melted, that one rumour at least of Rome was true. Princess Mancelli had on more than one occasion paid up Montebruno's losses. There was surely little more that either could do for the other in proof of friendship! Each had given the sacred hostage of degradation—the Princess when she let Montebruno look upon her as she lay humbled in the very dust, Montebruno when he permitted a woman to fill the purse that was empty.

The link between these two personalities was strong. It had been tempered by misery and tested by shame. And it had become much stronger since the Princess had been

encompassed by loneliness. Montebruno knew that he was a slave. Since the Princess's rupture with Cesare he knew that she, too, was a slave. She had entered his community. He was a clever man. He was even a decidedly intellectual man. But for his vice he might have been of value to his country. But his vice was withering his mind as a disease withers a body. He was becoming like a sapless leaf. All the energies of his life were concentrated upon one thing, and when by circumstances he was separated from that thing a sort of relapse, that almost resembled a dying, took place within him. Apart from gambling, only in relation to the affairs of Princess Manelli did he show any vital interest, any determination and strong activity. At her call there resounded within this hollow cavern of a soul an answer. To the summons of any other there was no reply, except the deep silence which is less human than refusal.

At Nice, in his uncomfortable lodgings, Montebruno received the letter in which the Princess told him that he had been right, that Cesare loved Lady Cannynge.

It was a long letter, an outpouring from one who had no other confidante. While the Princess had been writing it Nanna had been on her knees before a certain Madonna in the Church of the Gesù. So, in their different ways, two women looked to Providence.

Montebruno, in a dirty old dressing-gown, sitting near the window which looked into a back street of Nice, read carefully every word of the Princess. She had a habit of joining words and letters one to another by lines, which resembled the crossing of t's prolonged. This made her writing look unusually symmetrical and strongly characteristic, but made it difficult to read. The sun was shining, but Montebruno had to get his eyeglasses before he could make out all that she had put down on the grey crinkly paper, with the little coronet in gold, and the monogram L. M. at the top. As he sat there, without a collar, and with his lean and yellow neck exposed, he was more like a weary bloodhound than even when he had sat at Countess Boccara's dinner-table. In his long-nailed fingers, which were dried up and thin, and which looked predatory, he held the paper high. Slowly he turned the sheet. His tall forehead was alive with shifting lines, although he was not talking. The

big lobes of his large and pendulous ears showed almost transparent as the sun fell on them. He moved his lips with a faint, munching sound. Very much alone he looked, as no human being can ever look when there is another within his view. His strained and blood-hot eyes had a piteous and yet a ruthless expression as he read and re-read the long letter.

On a table near his tumbled bed stood his black coffee, getting cold, with a liqueur-glass full of brandy beside it. At last he remembered, emptied the contents of the glass into the cup, and sipped. He made an ugly face as the tepid mixture touched his mouth, drawing back his flexible lips and showing his long yellow teeth. By nature he was an epicure. Only his dominating vice induced him to live in such lodgings, to drink such coffee. (The brandy was his own and was good.) He had not even a valet. Presently he laid the letter down, pulled the grey and blue-striped dressing-gown, which had fallen open, mechanically about him, held it tightly, and sat there in the sunshine, with the lines darting about in his forehead and his eyes staring at the floor.

Lisetta had helped him with money to indulge in his vice. How was he going to help her?

Certainly not by praying to the Madonna. Montebruno had no belief in a merciful God or a future life. He did not even desire to believe in either. He was interested in scientific progress, so far as he could be interested in anything that was not gambling. But he saw no reason in man for a future existence. For humanity he had a great contempt. Even in his love he had not discovered a need of religion, or a thirst for something beyond the woman he had loved.

In her letter, which was a veritable outpouring—almost the equivalent of those tears in which she had not indulged—the Princess had exposed the raw of her soul. She could never forgive, though she might adore, Cesare for abandoning her. But if the break between them was followed by his entering into some suitable engagement with a young girl, who was in a good position and had a copious dot, her pride would be at least partially safeguarded. In time, with her influence and her self-possessed cleverness, she would

be able to create and diffuse the legend that she had 'made Cesare marry.' In time, if that were to happen, an impression might follow, and grow up, that she had done this because she had got tired of Cesare. Her ever smarting pride longed desperately for assuagement, though it showed no trace of its gaping wound except to Montebruno. And what she had seen at Duchess Miravanti's had terrified her pride.

'If Cesare marries I can bear it' she wrote. 'But if—I can't bear that. I should be the laughing-stock of Rome. Everybody expects him to marry, thinks he meant to marry. I feel it, I know it. Nobody says anything to me, but it is in the air. His horrible mother of course says he has no thought of marrying. But that means nothing. She and his father are both longing for him to take a wife. You know her so well. Can't it be managed? Can't you do anything? Oh, Giorgio, I will not endure that it should be known in Rome that he left me for another irregular relation. That would simply prove to everybody that he threw me away, got rid of me—of Lisetta Mancelli—that he had no desire to marry, but that she was sick and tired of me. If he marries I can still save the situation. He must marry. He must. I have not slept all night. By the way, when he had finished skating with her he left her beside his mother. What do you think of that? For a moment it almost made me fancy that perhaps he didn't really—but it's no use. When a woman *knows* a thing of that kind it is so. *She* is developing amazingly. But you cannot understand her. My instinct tells me she is a good little thing. Unfortunately she is interesting too. How rare that combination is! So rare that perhaps I am wrong and she is really *une petite chatte*. I have thought that too. She puzzles me. People in Rome are beginning to say she is "an odd sort of woman." But I think she is more admired than before. *La petite jalouse est tout bonnement furieuse!* Tell me what can be done, what you can do. Or, better still, come to Rome. Cannot you leave your demon for two or three days to help me with mine? You know Baronessa Vitragli, the Bostonian. She had a reception to which I went two nights ago to meet a Buddhist monk. He gave

a lecture on the joys of Nirvana. And what do you think his definition of Nirvana was? "Nirvana means the extinction of individual emotion, thought, sensation—the annihilation of everything that can be included under the term 'I,' the final disintegration of conscious personality."

'What a joy to seek after! *Gran Dio!*

'Her husband is for ever at Frascati. You know why. And can you believe it? that poor Denzil—so everybody is beginning to say—actually left the children in his care, as guardian. Are not the English *impagabile*?

'Giorgio, can you—can you come? ELISETTA.'

And that night, but only after a long struggle with himself, Montelaura forsook his demon, left the dingy lodgings in the back street of Nice, and started in the express for Rome.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE shock of her husband's death changed Edna Denzil. One part of her nature, the mother-part, it deepened, made richer, finer, warmer than it had been before. Her tenderness, her love for her children increased, became a passion, now that the care of a father was snatched for ever from them. The power of devotion in her which had been dispersed, which had done so much work in the world quietly for her Franzi, as well as in the home for her children, was now almost fiercely concentrated. She was the mother-bird with outstretched wings brooding over the nest in which were her young ones. But no woman is all mother. The Edna Denzil the Roman world had known and been charmed by was not softened, not improved by suffering. She was even, perhaps, a little warped. And yet the change was not unnatural, was almost inevitable. She had been an exceptional woman, exceptionally sweet-tempered, free from all jealousies, from feminine pettinesses, and feminine arts of attack and defence. But she had been exceptionally happy.

And she had always been conscious of wearing the protective armour in which a strong man's complete love clothes the woman he loves. For years she had envied no woman. Possessed of a nature which clung instinctively to the essential things of life she cared nothing for life's trappings, and was incapable of the small jealousies of women, jealousies connected with money matters, clothes, good looks, worldly success, men. But she was capable of envy, and now that Denzil was dead she knew it. Bitterly, fiercely, she envied every woman who had at her side a strong man to love and protect her. In the deep waters of her soul strange weeds floated up and showed themselves sometimes like shadows.

The change in Edna Denzil was sharply traced in the transformation of her feeling towards Dolores. One thing she had to forgive her Franzi, the keeping from her of the knowledge of his fatal illness until the eve of the operation. She forgave him. But she could not forgive Dolores for having known of it before she did, for having prepared everything for the ill man's comfort while she, his wife, did not know he was ill, for having consulted with doctor and nurse, discussed possibilities, hopes, fears, while she, in blank ignorance, concerned herself with the preparations for a children's party. So long as Franzi was alive the whole matter seemed subtly different. And she could bear it. She could write that note thanking Dolores, could allow Dolores to kiss her, could be moved by her kiss. If Franzi had recovered from the operation she could have borne it. But when the coffin containing his body went down into the the pit beneath the cypress trees her heart cried, 'I can't bear it!' Under her veil she looked across the open grave at Dolores, and she felt as if she hated her. She was shocked at herself, condemned herself, almost hated herself for the feeling. She fought with it, but she did not overcome it entirely. There remained with her a dreadful distaste for Dolores.

That distaste threw a shadow upon the life of Dolores. From distant Frascati far across the Campagna it fell, and lay upon a palace in Rome.

Immediately after the death of her husband Mrs. Denzil and her children left the flat in the Via Venti Settembre, the home of the happy days, and removed to Frascati. The

bustle of a city had become terrible to the widow. Sounds that had hitherto fallen cheerfully upon her ears were now hideous to them. The shock she had undergone had affected her body as well as her mind, and for a long while—so she afterwards believed—she was not physically normal.

She fled across the Campagna. Always afterwards that removal remained in her memory as a flight from a city that had changed, from a dreadful city. Between her and it she put the great plain that was almost like a stricken sea dividing her from a lost happiness.

Mrs. Massingham, Edna's widowed mother, had for some time been established in Frascati in a comfortable pension—she liked pensions—looking towards Rome. But she now hastened to move into an apartment big enough to contain her, her daughter, and grandchildren. She selected the upper part of a house in the Viale Giuseppe Ponzi as the new home.

This viale is reached by a flight of steps descending at the left of the broad tree-shaded walk which runs parallel to the road by which carriages gain the Piazza Romana. It is quiet, almost deserted in appearance, and consists of a broad terrace with two or three houses on the right. On the left the ground drops sharply beyond a wall to the open space before the small railway station. The terrace turns at right angles and is hidden behind a gaunt and ugly 'Magazzino di Carbone,' which is the last house in the row. Beyond the end of the terrace loomed up a great yellow building with a tower, cutting the view from that point. But Mrs. Massingham, though not specially enamoured of nature, had—because rooms were sufficiently spacious, and not too expensive—selected an abode from the windows of which a great prospect was to be seen. The upper part of the house, which now belonged to her and her daughter, was composed of two storeys. The rooms in the top storey opened on to a terrace, or hanging garden, which was the roof of a large loggia with pillars below. This loggia, the walls and ceiling of which were tinted a deep red, was closed in at the two ends by towers containing rooms. Other chambers opened by French windows into the loggia, which was arranged as a sort of

family and general sitting-room. Here, when the weather was not too cold, the children could play. Here Edna Denzil could work, attend to her business, or sit looking out over the Campagna towards that Rome which had seen her great happiness and the end of it. And here, too, Mrs. Massingham could read light literature, embroider, play patience, sing *stornelli* and May songs to the grandchildren, or talk to them, the servants, or any visitors who sought her out in what she called her *casa di Campagna*. At first she missed the pension, where she had encountered a good many *forestieri* who had sometimes amused her. But she was soon taken thoroughly by the new domesticity. She learnt, as good grandmothers learn without difficulty, to concentrate on her little descendants. Women love to be needed. Mrs. Massingham had the joy of presently realising that 'Nonna' could still be of some use in the world, was sometimes wanted, filled a special place, and was even of importance. Warmly she threw herself into the task of qualifying as a first-class necessity.

Mrs. Massingham was not a remarkable woman, but she was a woman who had always been liked, had had warm friends, and deserved them by her kindness and open nature. She belonged to a good old family of Lombardy, the family of Villaferato, who had a seat near Varese, and a house in Milan. But her dot had not been a large one when she married Henry Massingham, and his English estate and most of his money had gone to a son of his by a former wife. On his death his widow had returned at once to her native land. She was rather bronchial, and thought herself far more bronchial than she was. The climate of England, therefore, made no strong appeal to her. And when Denzil was given the post of Councillor to the British Embassy, she had removed from Cadenabbia, where she had been living, to Frascati. Rome made her feel bloodless, she always declared. Otherwise she would have settled there. Frascati had good air, and its prices were much smaller than those of Rome. Mrs. Massingham, therefore, had made the best of things on the hill above the Campagna. And now she had her reward. At a critical moment, a moment of tragedy and sorrow, four human beings fled to her. She rose to the task and the occasion.

In appearance she was not unlike a handsome owl of the brown species. She had a rather round face, thick brown eyebrows which arched themselves over round and yellow-brown eyes, a short nose, small full-lipped mouth, and round comfortable looking chin. She appeared to possess a great deal of hair, brown in colour, with a few fleeting suggestions of grey here and there, and she wore it in such a way as to make her head look large and round. Her hands were beautiful, and she had known that they were ever since she had known anything. She had an agreeable, slightly muffled voice, and a habit of blinking and of suddenly enlarging her eyes when she was talking. What her age was she did not happen to mention to any living person. She looked not more than sixty, and was growing stout. But this fact did not detract from her charm and rather added to her dignity, for she bore herself as one who deliberately intended not to remain slight, considering such a condition of body as wholly unsuitable to a gentlewoman of middle age. She was singularly unlike her daughter Edna.

Having abandoned the joys of the pension, and taken to a new way of life, Mrs. Massingham set herself to make a success of it. She showed unwonted energy in getting things into order and making the most of the accommodation at the disposal of herself and the Denzils. The death of her son-in-law had surprised and shocked her very much. She had been very fond of Francis. But either she was a philosopher, or else she had known enough of the chances of life to be prepared for any event. For she showed in this painful time a complete self-possession and a sort of soft resignation which were no doubt of help to her daughter, but which nevertheless made Edna feel that she could never let her mother know what havoc grief works in strong natures.

'Mamma wouldn't understand.'

Edna said this to the only person who she felt, indeed she knew, could understand, to Franzi's friend of friends, Sir Theodore. She bore no ill-will to Sir Theodore because he had known from the first of Franzi's condition. Mysterious sex spoke in her, and proclaimed that fact natural. Of course Franzi told his greatest chum. Of course the two men consulted together about her, the woman. Nor did

Edna Denzil ever think of visiting upon Sir Theodore her secret jealousy—for it came to that—at the thought of her days of ignorance, Dolores' days of knowledge. Yet Sir Theodore had told Dolores. She blamed no one, but she could not endure the thought of Dolores having known, and she could endure the thought of Sir Theodore's having known. And after her husband's death, side by side with the dawning of her deep distaste for Dolores, there grew in her a much deeper regard for Sir Theodore than she had ever felt before.

Their actions seemed to prove her right, not that she cared about that consciously one way or the other. Edna was very much a woman and knew how to be unreasonable. And she did not see how her different mental attitudes towards the husband and wife would be likely to affect their mental attitudes towards her. When the funeral was over, and the Denzils removed to Frascati, Dolores was the first woman friend to drive out from Rome and call upon them. She was received. It chanced that little Theo met her at the door. She sat with Edna and Mrs. Massingham in the confusion of the not yet arranged loggia. She felt genuinely full of deep sympathy, and held two sorrows, her sorrow for Edna, her prophetic sorrow for one not Edna. She tried to be natural, simple, to show what she felt. But almost instantly she knew that would be impossible. Edna would not have it so. The woman Dolores had kissed, had heard whispering against her shoulder, the woman who had written the note she herself could never have written, was no longer there. Instead there was surely the woman Dolores could, nay, must have been, had her circumstances been as Edna's were. Dolores understood that woman. As she sat with her trying to talk gently, naturally, trying hard to be her best self; she was hideously conscious of irrevocable things. The weeds in the deep waters! The weeds in the deep dark waters! Like shadows she saw them rising and withdrawing. 'And mine!' she thought. 'And mine!'

Mrs. Massingham, blinking and then enlarging her handsome eyes, earnestly thanked her for all that she had done, twisting and turning the sword round in her daughter's wound. And a sort of darkness came into the white cheeks of Dolores. She was conscious of a kind of despair and a

kind of heavy anger. Never would she forget the aspect of the loggia on that day, a warm, still, but melancholy day, cloudy and grey and full of presage. Some brown basket-work chairs stood about. These were covered with dull red cushions. Some pots with plants were ranged in a row not far from an angle. They were to 'go somewhere' presently. Meanwhile they were in dangerous proximity to a French window. Dolores was sure some one would open that window brusquely and do damage to the pots. And so indeed it happened. An Italian housemaid suddenly pushed the window with violence outwards. Two pots fell over and one was smashed to pieces. Mrs. Massingham, in her pleasant, muffled voice, protested, while Dolores looked away over the grey Campagna. Rome was but a blur in the far distance, most of its cut off from her sight by the yellow tower. From the blur, near a trail of white smoke, two or three livid blotches stood out. She wondered what they were, trying to distract her mind, in which arose a sense of unreasoning misery because what she had foreseen had occurred with the window and the pots.

How would Edna Denzil bear the burden? How could she confront life, with its arrangements of straw chairs with red cushions, its plants in pots to be put here or there, with its endless succession of meals, with its grey days? And oh! to gaze out over that Campagna to the blur which had been the city of happiness! A sob struggled up in Dolores' long throat. But it was for herself, perhaps, as much as for Edna Denzil.

She felt as if Edna Denzil were hating her and steadily trying not to. When she got up to go she wanted to kiss Edna. It would be the natural thing to do now, after all that had been. But she could not. Her body stiffened at the mere thought, and her soul seemed to stiffen too.

Afterwards she had thought, 'If I had kissed Edna what would Edna have done?'

Mrs. Massingham warmly embraced Dolores, and said:

'You dear pretty creature! Come again. In a motor it is nothing.'

She enlarged her eyes, blinked and added:

'I shall look out for you from here. It is such an

'advantage being where we can see every arrival from Rome. The sight of a little life is good, even if one doesn't take part in it.'

And she pointed with her small and beautiful hand to the avenue leading from the Campagna up the hill in front of the Grand Hotel, which was full in view of the loggia across a depression of waste ground planted with trees and shrubs beyond the station.

'I shall like to hear your motor purring like a great cat, my dear!' she concluded, pushing up her big, round head, to give another kiss to Dolores.

And often since then she had heard the purr of the motor, but Dolores was not in it, and the children greeted it with cries of 'Here's Uncle Theo!'

Princess Manelli had said that Dolores was not by nature a fighter. Perhaps that was true. Certainly she felt that she could not fight to win a place in the Denzil family. Even the children, she thought, disliked her, were not really at their ease with her, except Iris, when she sat down to the piano. As she drove away that afternoon, descending the hill into the vast grey Campagna, she knew that she would not often return to the red-walled loggia. 'I've done my best!' she said to herself, 'I've done my best. And now Edna hates me.' And it was then that she decided to take her social life up again with determination, to throw herself into its energies and to succeed at least in them. She felt like one expelled. It was perhaps very absurd of her. But she was intensely sensitive. If she made an advance and was tacitly repulsed she felt physically miserable, and as if a rude hand had shot out and thrust her away. That afternoon in the Campagna she was beset by a sensation of having been humiliated. 'Why did I go? Why did I go?' she asked herself almost fiercely. But then she recalled Edna's situation, her sorrow, and the anger died away. She looked out of the open window, and saw the flocks of sheep closely gathered together, life clinging to life in the vast expanse of loneliness, where the Power outside our world seemed to brood as it does in the desert; she heard the call of a shepherd, savage and melancholy, with a lingering, downward cadence, and she had a desire for release. 'Oh, to be out of it all!' But—where? And the motor rushed

towards the domes and the towers of Rome, carrying her back to the social life.

She hurried into it again, before Sir Theodore returned from London. When he did return he found the writing-table in the green and red drawing-room covered with cards of invitation, and heard from his wife that she had been dining with Countess Boccara, and had already many engagements. He was amazed. Still haunted by the tragedy of the operation and his friend's death it seemed to him almost incredible that Dolores should already have taken up again the empty life of frivolity. But he did not express his surprise, and, another feeling, his disgust. Yes, he was disgusted. For this readiness for pleasure on Dolores' part, following so swiftly on the heels of her apparent deep sympathy, even of his restless anxiety and grief, which had seemed almost to mount to terror when Denzil had died, surely showed her to possess a nature incurably shallow and changeable. 'And if I were to die?' her husband thought. And again there came upon him the helpless and humiliating feeling that he did not yet know his wife. Since when had he begun to feel actively that he did not know her? If he had searched back—but this he did not do—he might have discovered that the birth of this conscious ignorance dated after the evening of his outburst concerning his wife's barrenness. Upon that evening the silence had closed upon them both like a cloud, and in the womb of that silence had been conceived his feeling. It began to torment him, and to render him often ill at ease in Dolores' company. His instant, and expressed decision neither to go out, nor to entertain any more that season, was expected by Dolores. Yet it fell upon her like a rebuke. She tried to harden her heart and set her lips tightly together.

'I shall have a lot to do now,' Sir Theodore concluded. 'But anyhow I haven't the heart for going into society.'

He nearly added, 'And have you—really—Doloretta?'

If he had said that, taken Dolores in his arms, let her see his surprise, his grief, but also some belief that in her heart there was something responsive to his, she might, in her then condition of almost quivering sensitiveness and longing, have cast pride away, and flooded him with the truth. But he said nothing more. He let the moment pass, deceived

by a physical detail, the tight line her lips made just then.

And from that day both of them began to strive to gather in a harvest from life. But while Dolores set herself to the reaping of tares, her husband went into fields where there was wheat to be gathered. And so it was that Edna Denzil presently was able to say to herself, 'I am right!' both in respect of her distaste for Dolores and of her greater affection for Sir Theodore.

Day after day a big motor came out from Rome by the Porta Furba and spun along the flat road towards the little town on the hill, with its blunt-headed olive trees and its vineyards about it, and the Campagna breezes dancing in its face. A new life began for Sir Theodore with the death of his friend, just as a new life began for Mrs. Massingham. As always out of the dust of death blossomed the flower of life.

Sir Theodore took up the new life with a heavy heart. He was a man capable of so much feeling that any sorrow struck him a stinging blow. But he was a faithful man, and a man with fire in him. Soon he began to glow with energies, first of duty then of love born of duty's fulfilment. The love was there from the first, but his regret for Francis shrouded it, gave it a meaning that was tragic. And he even fought against the change that he felt was towards greater, unexpected happiness.

For years Sir Theodore had been long[illegible] r children. It was almost as if Francis called from the [illegible] 'Take mine!' It was almost as if his friend stopped his ears to that cry, but at last heard it in despite of himself because it was meant that he should hear it. Now children came into this man's life as they had never come before, in his middle age, just when a man of mental force and good health is apt to begin counting the years that are left, with a secret 'How long? How long?' He had waited, he had suffered, he had rebelled, he had even been cruel for children's sake, because of his need of them. Now he began to learn something of what children are, really are, in a life. For soon he began to be aware that till Denzil's death he had imagined but had not known. Intuition was struck away. He had tottered. Now he walked hand in hand with knowledge.

Little Theo must be his special care. He would be respon-

sible to Francis for what the boy became in later life. It was difficult, almost impossible, to have serious doubts as to Theo. He was not a saint but a boy. But no malign spirit ever looked out of his eyes. Even when he was in a temper, or in a rage, the thing whose home is the pit never rose to confront you in a look or a movement. Nevertheless Sir Theodore was beset at first by the anxieties of the deeply conscientious amateur. For the first time he felt, 'How different I am from a father!' Evidently the instinct, the infailing instinct, of a father is only born in a man when God and a woman make him one. Sir Theodore must fumble for it, but he must never let Theo know he was fumbling. He wished to strike the happy mean betwixt laxity and strictness, to stiffen the boy's back without dulling the brightness of his ingenuous charm. And he was above all anxious never to assume in this poor little family any sort of right. Full of delicacy he wished to protect, to help, to guide as a man may, and as only a good and straight man can, but never to be intrusive or challenging. In the first days after his return from London he was full of tentativeness, even full of indecision. But he was clever enough to hide both.

He had first to talk over business matters with Edna Denzil. Francis had not been far wrong when he had said that there would not be very much for his family. There was not. But, with the money coming from his policy of life insurance, there was enough for his wife and children to live upon quietly, enough to educate Theo thoroughly well and to launch him in life. But it would be necessary for them all to live carefully and to avoid anything like extravagance. Sir Theodore had gone to London with a view to changing some of Francis's investments. He knew more about finance than Francis had known, and enjoyed the advantage of having expert advice on money matters from America. He had Mrs. Denzil's permission to use this advice for her advantage by selling out certain English investments and placing the money in safe American enterprises which brought in a higher percentage. Sitting one afternoon in the loggia overlooking the Campagna he explained things to her. She listened, agreed, and thanked him.

The two elder children were out walking with Marianna. Vi was unwell and in bed. Mrs. Massingham had gone to tea with a friend in the famous pension. She had not wished to go, but Edna had begged her to go.

'You must not give up all your little pleasures, mamma, because of us,' she had said. 'Why should you not have tea alone with a friend?'

'She has her own room of course, otherwise——' began Mrs. Massingham.

'Go, mamma, go. You must pass your time,' said Edna.

So by chance she and Sir Theodore were quite alone.

When they had finished talking of the necessary business there was a dead silence between them. Their subject done with, abruptly they seemed to fall away into a sort of ghastly space, a nothingness. The truth of grief—atmospheric—enveloped them, but they had naught to cling to. And not only that, they were almost as strangers to one another. A widow—could it be Edna Denzil? A man doing business, discussing the children's monetary future—could it be Sir Theodore?

In that silence they were as strangers in space. The brown chairs with the red cushions now stood in their appointed places. The plants, too, had found their homes. On a table lay some books, *L'Italie*, which Mrs. Massingham read and Edna never read, a piece of embroidery, a box containing two packs of cards. Augustus, too, was there reposing upon his left side.

Sir Theodore saw the creature, and was no longer in space.

'How are Theo and Iris bear—getting on here, Edna?' he said, recalling her.

As she looked up he realised that sorrow had made her plainer. Physical alteration he noted, and almost in despite of himself. He had not noted the deeper change.

'I scarcely know,' she said. 'I scarcely know anything.'

She looked at him, utterly careless of the physical change in herself.

'I feel'—she gazed round her at the loggia—'as if I'd been pushed out of everything and the door locked against me, or—I don't know. I can't understand being here. I can't feel that I shall live here. When I get up in the morning it isn't like living. And when I go to bed at night——'

She broke off. After a moment she added:

'It's stupid of me, Theodore, but I can't help it—I feel more dazed every day.'

'The quiet here, the pure air, in time they will do something for you.'

'Yes, I suppose they will.'

'And Edna, the children!'

'Without them I don't think I should be here any longer.'

'Here?'

'I don't mean in Frascati.'

Again the silence fell. But in it they were no longer like strangers in space. Sir Theodore was aware of the Latin fire, the Latin despair in his friend. The charming wife, the charming mother was made strangely forceful by grief. He felt a violence in her which till now he had not suspected.

'There is your mother too,' he said.

'Mamma—yes.'

He realised that Mrs. Massingham would never be very much in her daughter's life.

'I made her go out to-day. A friend asked her to tea. Poor mamma! But she has been a great help, and she loves the children. She sits to them when they're in bed. Just think! Mamma singing!'

She looked vacantly towards the Campagna and added:

'Canta la rondinella . pace e amore
Canta l'augurio bello del signore'

she sings that. Iris loves it. And I sit here, when it's warm enough at night, listening.'

On the last word her eyes met his, and he was able to go right down into her despair. And he knew that he might go, that she almost, perhaps, wished him to go. Her eyes seemed to say:

'You were his friend. You knew him. You loved him. You may go where no one else may.'

In that moment Sir Theodore knew that though Edna Denzil was still young, though no doubt she would again be charming to the world—for Time is inexorable in his dealings with sorrow as with joy—yet she would always be a widow. She would never give up the name Francis had bestowed upon her.

'Dolores has been to see me,' she said, as he did not speak.

'Of course. She told me.'

'It was good of her. Mamma quite loves her.'

Sir Theodore wanted to say warmly that he hoped Dolores would often come, that he hoped Edna would take her into the new life at Frascati. But he could not. He thought of the writing table covered with cards of invitation.

'Remember,' he said, 'that in Rome there is always a home for you to come to. I speak for Doloretta as well as myself.'

'Thank you, Theodore—I know. But—you won't be hurt?'

'No, no. What is it?'

'I think it will be a very long time before I shall be able to come into your apartment. I can't help it.'

'Because—I understand.'

'Make Dolores understand too. She has been so kind——' Edna swallowed, and two vertical lines showed themselves in her forehead above the inner ends of her eyebrows. 'So good. I shouldn't like her to think me——'

'She never could. She could never misunderstand you, Edna. She knows you far too well.'

'And I don't think I shall come to Rome at all for a very long time.'

Again she looked out over the Campagna. On the extreme right of the view visible from the loggia there was a small section of the distant city. The day was not very clear. On such a day from Frascati Rome is as a city hinted at rather than a city seen. In the great plain there is something which suggests to the imagination the congregation of men. Smoke rises, trailing away towards the sea, perhaps, or towards solitary Monte Soracte. Vague shapes show themselves, but as if surreptitiously. Dashes of white, darknesses—are those buildings? That tiny upstanding shadow—is it the dome of St. Peter's?

From the loggia Edna could not see that shadow. But she saw enough to tell her that Rome indeed was there, and suddenly her eyes filled with tears and overflowed.

She did not wipe away the tears. She let them run down her devastated face. Why should not Theodore see them? He, too, had loved Francis.

And in that distant city people were saying, and were even believing, that the man and the woman in the loggia were lovers.

CHAPTER XIX

MRS. MASSINGHAM read the *Italie* regularly, and she could not resist occasionally telling her daughter scraps of its social news. She knew Edna was profoundly indifferent to all that went on in Rome socially, politically, in every way. But she had an expansive nature, and an almost physical desire to share things. And as the years increased upon her she was inclined to yield more and more to her inclinations, which were very innocent and harmless. Through Mrs. Massingham Edna came to know of the present career of Dolores. For, as presented by the *Italie* and other papers, the goings out and the comings in of Dolores assumed a definiteness, an importance, which were lacking from them in her own eyes. She was trying to 'find something to do,' trying to fill up somehow the void of her life. Secret misery sketched out behind her actions a faint background of defiance. And this background impressed the world and apparently also the Roman newspapers. One evening, towards twilight, Mrs. Massingham, in her pleasant, though slightly monotonous voice, read out to her daughter a paragraph from the *Tribuna* alluding to the *Sguardo Imperiale* of Lady Cannynge, then passing onward to the *Italie*, which to her was always a *bonne bouche*, recited in French a passage describing Lady Cannynge's skating feats at the Palazzo Mirgvanti, and closing with an allusion to her powers at bridge. 'If Lady Cannynge draws even a moderately good partner she is almost certain to win the prize at Princess Giarracho's forthcoming bridge tournament,' the writer concluded.

Mrs. Massingham laid down the paper.

'I never knew before that pretty creature was so

mondaine, Edna,' she observed. 'And somehow I don't think she looks it.'

'No, mamma?'

Mrs. Massingham took up her embroidery, held her head back, and examined it.

'Of course, she is very *femme du monde*. Where is my needle?'

'Isn't it in your work?'

'No.'

'Perhaps it has fallen under the table.'

'Don't bother, little daughter.' Mrs. Massingham nearly always spoke Italian to Edna. 'Oh, is it there?'

'I can't see it, mamma. But wait a minute!'

'Oh, here it is! I have found it.'

'Where?'

'It was in my work all the time. I am so sorry.'

Edna sat down again.

'Of course she is very *femme du monde*,' Mrs. Massingham resumed. 'But I don't know, I shouldn't have thought her heart would be in that kind of life. Do you think she is quite happy, Edna, darling?'

'I can't tell. Perhaps there are not many quite happy people, mamma. But I think she has a great deal to make her happy.'

'Yes?'

'Franzi knew Theodore through and through, and he said to me once that Theodore had a golden nature.'

'What a curious expression, but I quite understand. I am sure Francis was right.'

'He was.'

'Then that pretty creature must certainly be very happy. That is a comfort. Oh!'

'What is it, mamma?'

'This time my needle really has gone under the table. I am so sorry! They slip away so easily.'

'Yes, mamma.'

'Here it is!'

'I think I chose well for us, Edna. This loggia is very comfortable and healthy too.'

'I am sure it must be.'

'And such a view! Not that I bother very much about that, for after all the Campagna is monotonous. Still it is a fine view, and we are fortunate to have it.'

'Yes.'

'Iris seems to love my singing, poor little thing! I sang the "Cantava l'usignolo" to her last night.'

'Was it that?'

'Yes. You know it begins "Cantava l'usignolo stamattina colla vocina sua gentile e fina." And when I had done Iris said, "That is your *vocina*, Nonna!" Wasn't that pretty of her, Edna?'

Thus Mrs. Massingham was wont to while away the hours which her daughter shared with her.

Genuinely fond though Edna Denzil was of her mother, grateful for the warm affection Mrs. Massingham unceasingly showed towards her and her children, yet there were moments, and not a few, when the past rose up as if conjured almost malignly from out of the ground by Mrs. Massingham, as by some sorceress. Edna missed not merely the love of a husband but the intellect of a man in her new life. Never had she been a *bas bleu*, never aspired consciously to great culture, or learning. But she had quietly and fully entered into every side of Francis's life. She had been accustomed to talk over with him European affairs. She had worked for him, and always successfully. Sometimes now, when Mrs. Massingham talked or read out paragraphs from the *Italie*, Edna would think of the *gaffes* of Francis, and how often she had set things right, would think of what she had done towards smoothing the way to Munich, would think of their long conversations by the fire in winter when the children were going to bed. She knew now that she loved the mind of a man, and not merely the mind of Francis, but the masculine mind for its own sake. Never had she fully realised this till now when Francis was dead. Like many others she had to lose in order to know. She did not say to herself that the masculine mind was finer than the feminine, and that therefore she needed it; she said to herself that because it was different from the feminine mind she needed it.

Mrs. Massingham unconsciously drew her daughter's attention to this need. And so, presently, Edna grew to

value something in Sir Theodore which she had not thought much of till now, the quality of his mind for its own sake, and for its difference from any woman's.

She began to see many things with a clear consciousness of seeing them which hitherto she had overlooked, or had not troubled much about. As a woman she began to realise the mental importance of man in the life feminine, as a mother to grasp the value of a worthy and straight man in the budding lives of children. Grief, perhaps, made her selfish in a certain respect, or, if not actively that, indifferent. And yet the connection that was presently established between Palazzo Barberini and the house in the Viale Giuseppe Ponzi was natural enough. It might almost be said that a dead man had decreed it when, in his terrible hour, he thought of his wife's and his children's future.

It came about that Sir Theodore began to live in the life at Frascati, and merely to exist in the Roman life.

Dolores did nothing to hinder him. Since the death of Denzil a fatalistic tendency, which perhaps she had always possessed, had begun to develop within her. Perhaps Edna Denzil might have attenuated, or even destroyed, it. If Edna could have taken Dolores simply, warmly, into her heart and the family nest, have claimed her help and sympathy, have used her—above all, that!—all might, perhaps, have been well. Dolores might have found within herself a generosity to enable her to conquer her obscure jealousy of the barren woman directed against the woman who was fruitful. It must have been hard to do. It might have been possible.

But the distaste of Edna for Dolores, bred by Sir Theodore's sincere action, served to deepen the cloud in Palazzo Barberini, widened the separation between husband and wife.

Sir Theodore knew nothing of it. He did not even suspect it. On the contrary he thought that all the distaste was on Dolores' side. He judged people—even women—by their actions, and the actions of Dolores during that Roman spring established in him the belief that though she had been sincerely fond of Francis she could never have cared for Edna. He could not otherwise account for the apparent discrepancy between her behaviour [illegible] Francis

was [illegible] and dying, and her behaviour now that he was dead. Never had he seen Dolores so given over to social distractions as she was now. He had been a good deal bored, even worried, by her efforts to form a sort of salon in the winter, but her life then had been quiet, almost peaceful, compared with her present life. There was, however, this important difference for him, that now he was definitely out of all his wife's social doings, whereas before he had felt it his duty to take a suitable part in them. He was determined not to condemn Dolores for plunging into gaieties almost before the grave had closed over Francis's coffin. But he felt that he need, nay that he could, have nothing to do with them. Dolores had her pleasures. He had his duty, and that lay at Frascati.

Very soon he knew that his pleasure, a pleasure he had never thought to have, lay there too.

The three children turned to him with the blessed simplicity and confidence of extreme youth, almost as to a necessary saviour. The death of her father had made little Viola ill. Her dazed and uncomprehending grief of a very small child was complicated with fright. She connected the sudden disappearance of Denzil with unknown horrors, such as dawn with such facility in a child's imagination, and cause such unspeakable dread. But she had not become ill at once. It was only after the family had been for some days at Frascati that she showed fully the effect that her father's death had made upon her. Then she was sick, feverish, and had painful fits of screaming, especially at night. The fever and sickness were soon banished by simple remedies, but it was evident that Viola was pining. She had lost all her affection, and her pretty ways, would not respond to Mrs. Massingham's coaxings and seductive blandishments, carried almost to an excess, and marked by strange noddings of the head, startling movements, and a vocabulary composed almost solely of nonsense words, and turned a cold shoulder even to her mother's endeavours to cheer her and hearten her. Only when Sir Theodore came upon the scene did she permit herself the indulgence of a faint smile, a half-roguish, half-petulant movement which recalled the Viola whom he had watched from behind the curtain one twilight evening. He remembered just how he had felt that day

and one afternoon, yielding to a sudden impulse of irresistible tenderness, that embraced a dead man as well as a living child, he almost roughly snatched Viola up in his arms, and, forgetting the lost father's beardless, his own bearded face, he pressed his lips against the little creature's small mouth. And as he kissed her again and again, he spoke to her in his deep bass voice. What he said he never knew. His heart seemed to cry out independently of his brain. To Mrs. Massingham, who happened to enter with her cards for patience, as he caught the child up, Vi appeared to be almost entangled in his moustache and pointed beard, so tiny was her face, and so closely did he press it against his. The grandmother expected an outburst of shrieks. But when Viola emerged she was flushed, and wrinkled up her face in a smile that was almost triumphant! And from that moment she 'got better.' Her spirits rose gently. Her little arts and minute coquetries began to peep out, like snowdrops defying the kind earth in spring. Her fears decreased and finally vanished.

Mrs. Massingham summed up the whole ma[illegible] words not without wisdom.

'The fact is' she said, as she sat down to lay out her cards, 'it is as I always suspected, Edna. Vi doesn't care for women.'

Marianna came in, and Vi was reluctantly parted from Sir Theodore. As she was borne away she looked back and cried out to him:

'I wants you every day!'

And in her high little voice there was a sound of innocent desire, and a sound of hope, perhaps also an arbitrary sound.

Sir Theodore came up to the two women. His bright eyes were shining.

'We shall soon have her well again,' he said.

'You!' said Edna.

'She doesn't care for women,' repeated Mrs. Massingham, laying the cards in careful rows and pursing her lips, while her forehead showed suddenly the exaggerated wrinkles peculiar to ardent patience players. 'She can't help it. I have known even babies in arms that could distinguish between — no, I shouldn't have done that! wait a moment!'

She fell into silence, knitting her brows, and rapidly opening and shutting her large yellow-brown eyes.

As Sir Theodore was going away that afternoon Edna Denzil went with him as far as the terrace. The big motor was waiting for him at the top of the steps near the public garden.

'Theodore,' she said—and she spoke as if with some difficulty, looking down—'Vi is inclined to make slaves of people.'

'Vi! Ridiculous!' he exclaimed. 'That mite!'

'A mite can have a compact little will. She has. What I wanted to say though is that we, as a family, must not try to make a slave of you. No! I just thought of that when Vi called out to you. Grief makes people——'

'Edna, I ask you not to speak like that!' Sir Theodore interrupted. 'Francis and I understood each other. We talked the—the matter over that day he told me what he had to prepare for. I told him how it would be. Do you wish it to be otherwise?'

'No. How could I? But still——' She spoke almost with a sort of obstinacy. 'We must not make a slave of you. Women and children are apt to cling and be tiresome. We all know that.'

For a moment he looked at her almost sternly. Then his face changed. He had been a diplomat, and knew when it was wise to take things lightly.

'You are quite right. I will defend myself as best as I can,' he answered. 'But I'm afraid of Vi, and I don't believe I can pull myself together enough to disobey her. However, we shall see.'

That afternoon, as he drove down into the Campagna, he recalled every detail of that twilight afternoon with Francis, when their talk had been interrupted by the children's return, and he had hidden himself and watched Viola with her father. And for a moment he felt as if his action in snatching up the little one and kissing her into hope and forgetfulness had in it something terrible, something traitrous. He remembered how, when she hid her face against her father's shoulder, a knife had seemed to be driven into him, and how, at that moment in thought he had been unfaithful to Dolores.

And that now, in so short a time, Viola should have to turn to him! There was something too drastic, too frightful, in the perpetual transformations of life. They were too merciless, too unprepared. It was as if they were often deliberately designed to crush the souls of men to the dust, or to wring from the hearts of women that most frightful of protests, the cry in which with despair a sharp rage, that is almost animal, is mingled.

The motor passed a giant cypress tree which stands sentinel on the right of the road as one descends from Frascati, and Sir Theodore had an odd thought, 'The safety of that old tree compared with mine!' And the trees fled away on either side backwards in the gathering dusk, and the Campagna, vague, full of faint darknesses, with its peculiar atmosphere of dignity, and of romance with a hint of old savagery, gave itself to the motor like a prey.

A report like a pistol shot rang out. Pietro, the chauffeur, applied the brakes, and wrinkled up his face into an expression of resigned contempt that was half philosophic, but only half. And instantly the Campagna was changed. No longer a prey it had become a huge, and almost threatening power, desolate and mysterious, with the bare and barbaric Sabine Mountains planted like troops along its frontiers.

Sir Theodore threw off his coat, opened the door and got out. Pietro hated to be helped by his master in anything connected with the motor. So Sir Theodore said:

'I'll walk on, Pietro. When you've finished you can catch me up!'

'Sissignore!'

Still with the half-contemptuous expression on his face Pietro bent down to get out his tools. And Sir Theodore walked on slowly towards distant Rome. The evening was falling, bringing its gift of delicate romance to watch-tower and to farm, to pine and ilex tree, to every fragment of ancient ruin, to all things that moved slowly in the vastness, to every sound that floated over it. The wind was light, fresh, but not actually cold. Sir Theodore put up his hands. Yes, surely it came from Ostia and the sea.

Behind him lights began to gleam here and there in Frascati. No doubt a lamp shone over Mrs. Massingham's rows of cards, illuminating her mistakes. What was little

Viola doing now? And what Edna? How extraordinary the difference the coming of night makes every twenty-four hours in the life and feelings of man!

In the distance between him and Rome Sir Theodore heard the pealing of little bells. A belated wine cart was approaching. Soon it came up and passed. The big mule held its head low. Under a striped blue and red hood Sir Theodore discerned the hunched form of the carettiere abandoned to sleep. Just behind the hood, on a barrel covered with a bit of sacking, sat a woolly brown and white dog barking at the Campagna. The bells soon died away. Far off there was the sound of a distant shot, then of sheep and lambs baaing, and melancholy, rough cries of their shepherds. Flights of birds, some twenty or thirty together, eddied through the sky moving towards Albano and Rocca di Papa. The hay-ricks looked like jet black beehives, swollen to an unnatural size. The solitary towers that rise here and there in the solitude, narrow and almost fearfully alone, were losing their aspect of solidity, and resembled straight columns of dark smoke melting gradually and about to be dispersed in the immensity of night.

As Sir Theodore walked on between the huge stretches of grass-covered flat land which lay to left and right of the road he was glad that a tyre had burst. But for that Nature would not have been able to draw near to him with her hands full of consolation, mysteriously, and almost in defiance of his reason, laying his fears to rest, taking him beyond them for a moment, breathing into his soul her perpetual message, 'As I am beyond all fears so shall each man, each woman be at last—and for ever.'

He hoped Pietro would be slow in accomplishing his task. He had never before walked far out in the Campagna alone at nightfall. He had not known its balm for the spirit.

A shepherd passed with his flock and his big dog. He was whistling. And his little tune came gaily from under the brim of his broken black hat, which was pulled down over his eyes. He turned and stared after Sir Theodore, but he did not cease from whistling. Beyond Sir Theodore now stretched a lonely road. For a little while, as he walked along it, he heard sounds faint and espaced; a call that seemed to come from some fortress in the Sabines and that

died in the shifting grasses; the whinney of a horse, and those faint noises of evening in solitary places which, as it were, at the same time are, and are not, which seem to be known by the spirit rather than to be heard by the ears; then the silence seemed to him to be complete, and in its completeness tremendous and beautiful—like the Ludovisi Giunone.

He did not know whether he had walked on for a long or a short time, when he saw on the left side of the road a dark and motionless object. It was short. For a moment he thought it must be a stone post. Then he saw it was a man. The man did not move as he approached. There were no sheep about him. No dog moved near him. And his attitude and immobility were so strange that on reaching him Sir Theodore involuntarily stopped. Even as he did so he saw that this man was Giosuè Pacci. Wrapped in a dark blue cloak, with a soft and very old brown hat crushed down upon his fine head, and a stout staff in his hand, he was gazing with his child-like blue eyes into the night, and perhaps hearing strange voices from the past; from the little farm of Horace near Tivoli, from Cicero's villa on the height of Tusculum, from Hadrian's wonderful dwelling at Tibur, from the Lamian Gardens, or the sea-house of Nero by the waters of Antium.

'Signor Pacci!' said Sir Theodore.

Pacci quietly looked at him, recognized him and smiled. When he smiled the whole of him was kind, almost tender, but the whole of him seemed to remain a little remote; not because of his intention, but because he could not help its being so. He was evidently not at all surprised by Sir Theodore's appearance. Why should not any sensible man be faring alone in the Campagna while night was drawing on?

'Buona sera!' he murmured, still gently smiling, and looking very straight into Sir Theodore's face.

He stepped down into the road, quietly joined Sir Theodore, and walked slowly but firmly along beside him. If he had been let alone he would probably have continued thus till their feet trod the pavements of Rome without uttering a word. But Sir Theodore, like many others, loved to hear Pacci talk, and to find him alone in the Campagna was a chance to be valued. Pacci haunted the Campagna, but

always went into it, and nearly always came out of it alone. He was absolutely indifferent to company, though he always seemed perfectly at home when he was in it.

'Do you know that grand old fellow of a cypress on the left of the road going up to Frascati?' said Sir Theodore.

'Si—si!' said Pacci.

The conversation was carried on in Italian.

'As I came down the hill just now I wished I were he.'

'From love of him, or fear of yourself,' inquired Pacci mildly.

'I'm afraid it was the latter.'

'Most Europeans who really think are full of fears. People live in the present, and the present has the terrifying quality of all actuality. The mystics are less cowardly because they dwell in the future with God, or perhaps with Madonna, or with some kindly saint deeply attached to them as they might be attached to a good servant. Antiquarians live chiefly in the past, and they again put aside fears unconsciously.'

'Have you ever felt afraid, *caro* Pacci?' said Sir Theodore.

Pacci was silent for a little while.

'The thunderbolts will not fall upon me at present. Fulgur and Summanus will let me do a little more work,' he observed at length, placidly. 'I have planted many flowers between the two summits of the Capitoline Hill.'

'What stood there? Some place of propitiation?'

'The sanctuary of him who came from the loins of Jupiter, Vediovis.'

'To be sure, the evil Jupiter.'

'They must all have their flowers, just as the active gentlemen of Rome must have their monument, clear of such rubbish of Palazzo Venezia as can be quickly carted away.'

'Would you not be glad if Vediovis overwhelmed them with one of his storms?'

'But if the drains should be flooded!' said Pacci. 'Who could attend to that, when they will soon be beautifully busy joining together the three palaces on the Capitol, as a disease might join my fingers with membrane?'

He held up his broad hand.

'We must not ask too much even of the gods of

misfortune,' he murmured, and in his smile there was just a hint of the gentlest, most innocent satire.

'How you must hate modern Rome!' said Sir Theodore. 'But—no—I expect you seldom see it. You live in the things you care for, and very few men do that. Would you believe it if I told you that this is the first time I have ever walked in the Campagna at nightfall? I have walked in the Corso a hundred times.'

Pacci stopped. He turned towards the hidden place of the sea. The breeze had grown a little stronger. Sir Theodore turned with him, and it blew directly into their faces, coming over the grassy plain which melted away into the dusk.

'Yes,' Pacci said. 'It comes from the sea. If we were in the Corso it would come from the monument.'

He opened his mouth wide, and stood thus for two or three minutes breathing in deeply.

'One should walk where the wind can come to one from the sea as often as possible,' he continued at last, walking slowly on again. 'Nature is not like a modern woman. She requires to be encouraged. It is not always she who wants you. But if you want her she is a generous creature—a generous creature. She is a marvellous collaborator both with the brain and with the soul. She helps the one in creation, and she puts into the other a beautiful necessity.'

'What necessity, Pacci?'

'The imperious need of being grateful to some one, as Kant says.'

Lifting his hand he quoted in an almost singing voice:

'Observe a man when his spirit is most [illegible] his moral instincts. In the midst of a beautiful scene of nature, invaded by a full, but calm sense of well-being, there seizes him an imperious need to be thankful to some one.'

He paused, then in a muffled voice he added:

'And the Campagna is Nature's most beautiful scene, and peopled, thank God, only with memories.'

'Some of them scarcely calm and beautiful though!' said Sir Theodore, with a touch of irony, wishing to rouse his companion up.

But Pacci did not seem to hear him.

'Horace, Hadrian, Cicero——' he murmured.

'And Nero?' interjected Sir Theodore.

Pacci looked round at him rather sharply.

'I always connect the thought of Nero with beauty and with calm,' he observed. 'I do not need to go to Anzio to forgive him for his mistakes and his errors. Wherever Nero is known to have lived dig, and you will discover some glorious Greek work. This fact proves that in the soul of Nero existed a persistent love of beauty and simplicity.'

'I think the art-love of a man is often a passion quite apart from the rest of his nature,' said Sir Theodore. 'And not expressive of it—necessarily.'

In the distance out of the gathering darkness rose the loud and long cry of some shepherd. It sounded at the same time very fierce and very sad, but wonderfully real and vital; so vital that Sir Theodore felt as if it plunged him abruptly up to the neck in humanity, coarse, perhaps brutal, but tingling with the almost terrible interest of life.

'Men are mysteries and should not judge each other,' said Pacci, turning his head slowly in the direction of the cry. 'What an enigma was in that shepherd's call! And yet that shepherd only desired to express what was in him at that moment, and tried to do so with naked simplicity. Only he could not help being mysterious. Rome came from shepherds, but not even Rome ever was able to express what shepherds really were. And not even the monument will be able to express all that the modern Roman is.'

Sir Theodore could not help smiling at Pacci's last sentence, in which once again a faint and subtle irony glided.

'Tell me the truth, Pacci,' he said. 'I hear Hagenbeck has undertaken to supply a magnificent collection of wild beasts to Rome when there is a place for them in the Villa Borghese. Wouldn't you like to be allowed to feed them with—shall we say certain human mysteries?'

Pacci looked meditative.

'Are you making a mental selection, Pacci?' Sir Theodore inquired, at length.

'No, no! I am a great lover of animals,' murmured the historian.

At this moment the purr of the motor sounded behind them, and Pietro came up at top speed. Regretfully Sir

Theodore opened the door, and, to his surprise, Pacci immediately stepped in, sat down, and went on talking.

'No, no! And specially not in the Villa Borghese!'

Sir Theodore shut the door, and Pietro started. The strong lights of the motor illumined the white and deserted road, and emphasised the darkness of the great spaces on either hand. 'All that is done should be done in the suitable place,' went on Pacci. 'Otherwise ugly confusion arises.'

'You are thinking that the Colosseum——?' Sir Theodore began.

But Pacci interrupted him by saying:

'Is there a way of stopping it?'

'Do you mean the motor?'

'Yes. Can you stop it?'

'Of course. Do you wish me to?'

'Per piacere!'

Sir Theodore communicated with Pietro, who applied the brakes. Pacci opened the door on his side, got out and shut it with a snap. He then got up upon the step, and prepared to resume the conversation, holding to the door with both his hands and having his staff tucked under his left arm.

'You remember the kneeling angel that Leonardo painted in Verrocchio's "Baptism of——"'

At this point Pietro, under the impression that his padrone's mysterious acquaintance of the Campagna had been shed into the darkness, sent the motor on at a rapid pace.

'"Of Christ?"' said Pacci, thrusting one hand into the motor to make sure of Sir Theodore's attention, and holding fast to the door with the other. 'That angel stopped Verrocchio's brush. Now I——'

'Let me stop the motor, and then——'

But Pacci only held more firmly to Sir Theodore's arm, and, leaning well forward, continued earnestly:

'The world is said to advance. I don't say it does—but it certainly travels. I suppose the period for using wild animals in the way you suggest is one from which we have travelled away. But if a Leonardo could carve another angel on a certain building and stop——'

The motor sprang across an inequality in the road, and the historian executed what looked like some strange, and

perhaps symbolic dance. Sir Theodore broke away decisively and shouted to Pietro, who pulled up with a jerk.

Pacci immediately got down into the road, said, 'But we have no Leonardo!' made a slow gesture with his hand, and disappeared into the night, walking with a firm and composed tread. Pietro turned round, his large eyes rolling with inquiry, to ask what was wanted.

'*Ma come è ancora qui questo signore?*' he blurted out.

'*A casa! A casa!*' said Sir Theodore.

He leaned back in the motor and blessed Pacci.

CHAPTER XX

'BRIDGE has one supreme merit. It takes possession of the mind. While one is playing one is absorbed and can think of nothing else.'

Princess Manelli had given Dolores a recipe for forgetfulness one afternoon in the Palazzo Urbino. Dolores remembered the words in that Roman spring, and she found there was truth in them. When she was happy she had cared very little for bridge, though she had played sometimes to make up a four, and because every one played. Now she played in order to obtain short periods of forgetfulness, and she came to think of bridge not as a pastime but as a narcotic, and to care for it as a woman in physical pain might care for morphia. And as her love for the game grew her skill as a player rapidly increased.

She was now living chiefly in a world in which the unessential things of life are given vast importance, in which 'crazes' take the place of tastes, fashions suffocate individual desires, and freedom is a thing unknown, perhaps scarcely dreamed of. And she was trying to trick herself in regard to this world. Taken lightly it had its charm and its value. But Dolores was not in a condition to take anything lightly. She caught at a feather and tried, by her obstinacy of imagination, to turn it into a bar of iron. She was like a child that, holding in its hand a pebble, shuts

its eyes, clenches its teeth, and resolves that the pebble shall become a piece of money.

In her secret misery she was greedy, and she desired to seize everything the world to which she was clinging could give. As well as its frivolous side it had an apparently serious side. It not only danced, skated, lined, and played bridge. It also listened to music, discussed politics, dabbled in religions, and pronounced judgment on literature and art. Only in bridge, however, did Dolores find now and then for a time almost complete forgetfulness. She played nearly every afternoon as well as on most evenings. But on Sunday nights she usually went to the house of a certain Mrs. Eldridge, who gave parties which were not only smart, but were supposed to be also importantly brilliant.

Mrs. Eldridge was the widow of a very rich Englishman, and she had the reputation in Rome of being extremely clever. She was middle-aged, self-possessed, and apparently active-minded, though really middle-headed. Her special gift was to put subjects on the carpet and leave them there to be worried by her intellectual guests, while she and the guests who were not intellectual sat round and assisted at the *mêlée*. If any unwary person incautiously tested her by attempting to go profoundly into the discussion of a difficult subject she was out of her depth at once. Nevertheless through all Roman society she was spoken of as a very clever woman, and it was considered "the thing" to appear at her Sundays. She had chosen Sunday night for her series of receptions because she considered that the serious intellectuality at which she aimed was specially suited to a day that was a little apart from other days. Rome did not bother about such a subtle trifle as that. Mrs. Eldridge's wealth and determination had captured it, and it gave her a sort of special niche in its gallery of hostesses.

One Sunday night Dolores came rather late into Mrs. Eldridge's carefully decorated house which was in the Piazza dell' Indipendenza. Wonderful copies of famous Italian paintings hung upon the walls, most of them made by a Florentine painter whom Mrs. Eldridge had discovered a great many years ago. There were also a few genuine old masters, religiously separated from the rest and carefully

lighted up. The colours of carpets and hangings were subdued, almost austere, but very delicate, very harmonious. The few tapestries were admirable, the few bronzes classically simple, classically calm. On the Steinway Grand piano nothing was ever put except music. There were not too many sofa cushions, not too many flowers, not too many bibelots, not even too many servants.

Mrs. Eldridge's 'note' was an exquisite austerity, and she had been 'helped with her house' by some one who knew a great deal more than she did.

'True beauty is found in economy,' was a favourite remark of hers. 'Don't mistake me! Don't think I mean economy of money!' And then she would compose her rather large features into an expression of patient nobility, as of one who had to endure a good deal of misunderstanding at the hands of a world unable to rise to the heights on which she usually stepped.

Despite her austerity, however, Mrs. Eldridge was exceedingly fond of 'names' and smart people, and she lived up to her watchword when it came to engaging a chef or an artist, a famous lecturer, or a man to reset her jewels. Even upon the heights she kept an instinct that was worldly-wise, and understood that in an existence where all is vanity it is as well to be able to be vain.

As Dolores came in the last bar of a string quartet subsided, apparently on the leading note, and people began to move about, to break up into groups, and to say things that they hoped would be thought brilliant and quoted, or be thought deep and meditated over. The four players disappeared. Mrs. Eldridge never had too much string music. Economy! Economy! The jaded palate can savour nothing.

In the distance Dolores saw Lady Sarah Ides bending her characteristic head towards an invisible talker. She also saw Princess Manelli, Pacci, Mr. Verrall, Mrs. Toons, Count Boccara, Princess Carelli, and many others whom she knew. She was rather surprised to see Lady Sarah, who very seldom went to large parties. But she knew that Mrs. Eldridge was an old acquaintance of Lady Sarah's family, and was sometimes very determined in her invitations.

Mrs. Eldridge, in a remarkable gown of brown velvet with bronze lights in it, came rather mysteriously up and greeted Dolores with a careful imitation of the Monna Lisa smile.

'You heard the last note?' she asked, in a soft contralto voice.

'Yes. I am afraid I 'm very late.'

'The ear has to supply the key-note. The composer, Monsieur Martin, designed it so to stimulate his hearers to an intellectual activity. When I was in Paris in the autumn he allowed me to penetrate his new method.'

'How interesting. What is it exactly?'

Mrs. Eldridge moved with a sudden hint of restlessness.

'Well—the—the—he wishes to introduce into music the—the—note the Japanese long ago introduced into art, to carry it—yes—even farther. We have been too positive, hitherto, too detailed in art. And so—yes—we must be led to love indications, hints. We must learn to supply for ourselves what composers and painters could, but no longer choose to, give us. There you have the whole method in a——' She was probably going to say 'nutshell,' but she suddenly checked herself and substituted 'synthetic form.'

'How interesting!' Dolores almost mechanically repeated, looking into the large face of Mrs. Eldridge with her gazelle-like eyes.

'The step forward!' said Mrs. Eldridge. 'Art in the sense of æsthetic appreciation!'

She often quoted without putting quotation marks.

'Well?' she added, looking round.

Her eyes lit on a group of people talking rather eagerly at one end of the room under a copy of Raphael's 'Madonna del Cardellino.'

'Ah! a discussion!' she exclaimed. 'Let us join it!'

She put a plump and heavily-dimpled white hand upon the arm of Dolores, and drew her towards the group.

'What is it?' she said, as the talkers glanced round.

One, an eager-looking man, an Italian of perhaps forty, sprang up to offer his seat.

Mrs. Eldridge drew Dolores into it with her.

'Lady Cannynge and I saw something really interesting was going on here, and we are always on the alert for the keen minds. The Damascus blades for us!'

She looked round with her determined, but rather dull, eyes.

'What is it all about, Donna Flavia?'

Donna Flavia, a thin, plain, but very animated looking woman well over forty, replied in a high and energetic voice:

'We were talking about the *Donna Delinquente*.'

'Lombroso!' said Mrs. Eldridge, pressing her hand on the hand of Dolores. 'Well?'

Princess Manelli came up with Verrall, and stood on the outskirts of the group, listening.

'Marco will have it that the woman who sins always sins from one root motive.'

'One root motive!' repeated Mrs. Eldridge slowly, as if determined to fix the expression in her memory for all time. 'And what motive, root motive?'

'Love, in some form or other.'

The Italian opened his lips to break in. But Donna Flavia continued with even greater energy:

'You did contend that, Marco. And of course we all know exactly what you meant. You meant sex love.'

'I——'

'As a man always does when he speaks of woman's loving. It never occurs to him that we are capable of affections in which man has no part, into which he does not enter at all——'

'*Cara* Flavia,' vehemently interposed the Italian, smiling, however, with his whole face. 'I must beg you to except children, though even they are scarcely unconnected with man!'

'Oh, children!'

'Yes, indeed. I think a woman would be as likely to commit a crime for the sake of her children as for the sake even of her lover.'

'Her lover?' said Donna Flavia. 'And why not add—or her husband? Or do you think women never love their husbands, for excellent reasons supplied liberally by those husbands?'

Two or three people laughed. It was the fashion to laugh at Donna Flavia's sharp or downright sayings.

'This is profoundly interesting,' said Mrs. Eldridge. 'What do you say, Princess?'

She threw the remark to Princess Mancelli, who made a little gesture with her left hand and said :

'Nothing. I haven't grasped the discussion yet.'

A slightly satirical smile flitted over her face. 'When I am more enlightened —'

She glanced at Mr. Verrall.

'I will add—or of any man whom she loves, legitimately or not,' said Don Marco Torani. 'There are some deserving husbands even in Rome, I suppose, and some women who reward the deserving.'

'And for an idea,' said Donna Flavia. 'Do you mean to say that no woman would commit a crime for an idea? What about women Nihilists?'

'They always work in connection with men. I should contend that, if you could thoroughly look into the ramifications of Nihilism, you would find that they worked really because of men, because of enthusiasm caught from men, comrades.'

He paused and looked round the circle with his large and rather satirical eyes.

'Comrades! What a word that is! What a lot of secret things it covers in the mouth of a woman!'

'Really, Marco, you are the victim of an *idée fixe*!' exclaimed Donna Flavia. 'You see sex love in every action of every woman. That absurd manuscript Weininger, and that odious Nietzsche—both madmen by the way, for Weininger's suicide was an indication of insanity—have disturbed the balance of your mind, *amico mio*. Women act from many motives with which maternity and sexual affection have nothing whatever to do.'

'Look at Charlotte Corday!' said Mrs. Eldridge, emphatically.

'But in the first place I contend that Charlotte Corday did not sin!' exclaimed Don Marco.

He was evidently preparing to tackle Mrs. Eldridge seriously on the relation of violent acts to the general good of humanity, and the moral psychology of revolutionaries, when a thin old man, a senator, Signor Peraldi, interposed with these remarks, uttered in a faded voice :

'Where women differ from men is in this : a woman is capable of committing a sin, and never realising it is a sin,

because of the thought in her heart when she carries out her act. A man's thought does not blind him in the same way. Therefore more severe punishment should be meted out by justice to men than to women. French juries are not nearly so incompetent for their function as many people think.'

'The thought in her *heart*, senatore,' said Don Marco.

But the old man had already walked away.

'Oh, he used the right substantive,' said the Princess Mancelli.

There was a moment's pause. Something either in the old senator's manner, or in his matter, had produced a change in the mental atmosphere. But Mrs. Eldridge both hated and dreaded pauses at her parties. She thought they meant failure. Now, therefore, she made a mental effort, and flung down a subject on the carpet.

'You were speaking of husbands and—and wives,' she remarked, gathering listeners to her with a circular glance. 'I have noticed that different nations take different views of what is due from the man to the woman and—and con—and vice versa in the marriage state. Now what is the Roman view? Here we all are in Rome. Let us have the Roman view of the matter.'

A satisfied look spread itself over her face as she sat back on the sofa by Dolores. She had now only to wait for the *mêlée*. For the moment she had forgotten Princess Mancelli's relations with the Prince. Verrall began to speak quietly to the Princess, bending towards her in his agreeable, half-deferential, half-seductive way, and Don Marco, after a quick glance towards them, said:

'Even in Rome the man's views on that matter are sure to be different from the woman's.'

'Give us yours, Marco!' said Donna Flavia, in a satirical voice. 'They may serve as a guide to us all.'

'I assume'—Don Marco turned to Mrs. Eldridge, who was rather startled, and almost a little confused, at having more mental activity expected of her so soon—'that you mean the Roman view of marital unfaithfulness?'

Mrs. Eldridge had really not meant anything so definite as that, but she answered:

'Of course. What else could I mean, dear Don Marco?'

Don Marco's face had changed a little. It looked harder than before.

'I believe in the unwritten law—as regards the husband,' he said. 'I think'—Princess Manelli and Verrall were walking away slowly—'if a wife is unfaithful and the husband shoots her, strict justice has been done. I don't say I would do it myself, or even that I wish it to be done. I only say it is strict justice.'

'Of course! I could have said all that for you, Marco!' cried Donna Flavia. 'And the wife who shoots the unfaithful husband?'

'That is murder, not justice.'

'His father is Sicilian!' said Donna Flavia sweetly to those about her. 'That means about five hundred years in the rear of modern civilisation—and proud of it!'

Don Marco laughed.

'Possibly I am in the background mentally,' he rejoined. 'But I have met with'—his eyes happened to fall on Dolores—'with Englishmen who think just as I do, that there must—even owing to physiological reasons—be one law for men, another for women in this matter. What would your husband say, do you think, Lady Cannynge?'

She smiled.

'Oh, I think he is far too *civilised* ever, under any circumstances, to dream of daggers and pistols in connection with his wife,' she replied.

She looked lightly amused. But she was really thinking, with deep and sudden seriousness.

'If—what would Theo be like? What would Theo do?'

'And,' said Donna Flavia, who was always argumentative, and who was secretly devoted to Don Marco, 'if a husband drives his wife into sin by his cruelty, or his persistent neglect? Have you nothing to say for her, and against him, then, Marco?'

'A hit! a palpable hit!' exclaimed Mrs. Eldridge, who by long practice had become a highly efficient 'bottle-holder.'

Again Don Marco's face hardened, and his under jaw quivered for an instant.

'I do not defend him, but I say that a really good woman never could be driven into sin.'

'There I don't agree with you!' said a new voice breaking in.

A small, thin, dried up Englishman was the speaker.

'Bravo, Mr. Belton!' said Donna Flavia, scenting an ally.

'An angel might be driven into sin under certain given circumstances,' said Mr. Belton. 'If the angel were of the female sex.'

'Oh, but—' cried Donna Flavia. 'Are you, too, going to put us below men?'

'Far from it! Men never are angels, and they need no driving where it is a question of sin,' returned Mr. Belton.

'There, Don Marco!' said Mrs. Eldridge, in great delight, 'the battle is arrayed against you!'

'And what are the circumstances?' asked Don Marco, turning toward the little man.

'Poor people manage with very little to eat,' said Mr. Belton, in his thin and small voice. 'But if they are to live at all, they must have something, they must have the crust of bread. So it is with my angels.'

'And what must they have?' said Don Marco.

'At least a crust of affection, if possible from the man who has taken their life into his hands. But if they don't get it from him, and if they are to go on living—'

At this moment Mrs. Eldridge happened to see that a very important ambassadress was entering the farther drawing-room, and she got up.

'Now, Don Marco, what have you to say to that?' she observed. 'The crust of bread—a very admirable simile!'

She moved away, and Dolores rose and followed her. She wanted to remain, to hear more, but something within her told her not to do so. As Mrs. Eldridge went to greet the ambassadress Dolores paused, looking round for acquaintances, and her eyes fell upon a young girl whom she could not remember having seen before. This girl was standing close to the Princess Carelli, and Dolores—she did not know why—looked at her closely, with a scrutiny that took note of every detail of her appearance and dress.

She was evidently very young, perhaps eighteen, and was very pretty, but extraordinarily, almost unnaturally, like a doll. In every way she was what is generally called *petite*.

Her figure was narrow, her bones were small, her waist was so tiny that she looked as if at a rude touch she must break in two. Her head, crowned with a mass of yellow hair, in texture like spun silk, was flat at the back, going almost in a straight line into her minute and very white neck. Her complexion was marvellously pink and white, very fresh, very virginal, and her features were cameo-like in their regularity. She had bright, staring blue eyes, and exquisite little hands and feet. Simply, but beautifully dressed in white, she stood very still, looking about her with an air of absolute self-possession and without any curiosity. This entire lack of curiosity impressed Dolores unfavourably. It suggested coldness, almost heartlessness, in one so young.

A young man from the French Embassy came up and spoke to Dolores.

'Who is that little girl?' she asked him.

'Which little girl?' he said, looking around him. 'There are so many little girls in Rome, and indeed almost everywhere.'

'That one over there by Princess Carelli.'

The Frenchman followed her eyes.

'Ah!' he said expressively. 'But that little girl is a very important person!'

'May one ask why?'

'She is to have the biggest dot in Rome.'

'And that fact makes her important!'

'Does it not?'

'Of course.'

'She is Donna Ursula Montebruno.'

'A relation of Marchese Montebruno, the great gambler?'

'The daughter of one of his cousins, Giacomo Montebruno, who married Miss Mullins, the only child of the Colorado oil king. His Majesty has had the good taste to die, and that little lady will eventually possess enough money to make Midas uneasy in his grave. For she also is an only child. No wonder she is terribly self-possessed. Does not her hair glitter like a shower of sovereigns?'

'Poor little thing,' said Dolores.

'But why?'

Dolores lifted her shoulders slightly.

'I don't—know!' she murmured.

But in her heart she repeated, 'poor little thing!'

'The mother has a nervous illness. She is always breaking down, perhaps under the weight of the avalanche of dollars. I suppose Princess Carelli is taking the little lady out.'

Princess Manelli came up with Mr. Verrall, and the Frenchman spoke to Madame de Heder, who was sitting close by, watching the crowd with her light and sincere eyes.

Since Dolores had begun to play bridge regularly she had seen a good deal of Princess Manelli. Both the Princess and she were secretly seeking in cards a similar consolation, and they met fairly often in the house of ardent bridge players. The Princess played as a rule much better than Dolores, but her play varied little, whereas Dolores was rapidly improving her game.

'Do you like these parties?' said the Princess, touching the hand of Dolores familiarly.

'Mrs. Eldridge's?'

'Yes.'

'Why not? Surely they are very pleasant.'

'Yes. Music, discussion—by the way, why did you flee from the Donna Flavia coterie?'

'Was the discussion getting too hot?' asked Verrall. 'Was it like being in Bastion Four at Sevastopol?' Dolores laughed.

'Perhaps. And I am not very good at argument. It is not my line.'

'Bridge is your line,' said the Princess.

'Do you really think so?'

'You have come on wonderfully. I am getting afraid of you.'

'You play far better than I do.'

'But shall I—soon? There are still ten days before the Giamarcho tournament. By that time you may be irresistible. And I want that jewel.'

She said this as if in truth the prize for the winner of the tournament was the last thing she really wanted.

'I wonder what man I shall draw,' said Dolores.

'Not Mr. Verrall, I hope. He plays too well.'

Verrall looked pleased. He was what is generally called 'good all 'round man,' and had already become a far

greater success in Rome than Francis Denzil had ever been.

'Since I have played with you, Princess!' he said.

'Have I taught you so much?'

'But,' said Verrall, 'I have just heard from Prince Giamarcho that one of the best bridge players in Europe is to be in the tournament.'

'Who is that?' asked Dolores.

'Marchese Montebruno.'

'Quite true. He has come back unexpectedly to Rome, no one knows why,' said Princess Manelli. 'But Montebruno is always a mystery even to his oldest friends. I have known him all my life, and yet he never tells me anything.'

'Is he a fine bridge player?' said Dolores.

'Oh yes, simply wonderful,' replied the Princess. 'If you have the luck to draw him, and play as you do at present even, the jewel is yours.'

'The cards might be against us.'

'You would win all the same.'

People came up. An Austrian began to sing 'Mon cœur s'ouvre a ta voix.' Dolores made her way to a seat beside Lady Sarah, who whispered a friendly greeting with her peculiar charm of manner, which had its roots in the heart. They sat together in silence while the Austrian sang. And again Dolores looked at the little doll-like girl who was to have the enormous 'dot.' She had found a seat by Princess Carelli, and she listened to the warm passion of the song without the slightest change of expression. Her bright blue eyes travelled about the room, looking from one person to another, and finally they rested on Dolores. For nearly a minute the woman and the girl looked at one another. Then Dolores glanced down. She felt almost strangely repelled by 'that child,' as she mentally named her. And when the music was over she turned to Lady Sarah with a soft eagerness, almost as to a saviour.

But who can save another from what is ordained, by the Power outside, or perhaps by the Power inside, herself?

CHAPTER XXI

CESARE CARRILI was biding his time.

He was passing through a strange period, which was not at all understood by his men friends. It seemed to them incredible that Cesare should be without a woman in his life during all these months. Yet, as they could not discover her, they were eventually obliged to conclude that, lady or *cocotte*, she did not exist. Some of them chaffed Cesare. Others endeavoured to interest him in some of the pretty, and not too virtuous, women who are perpetually passing through Rome. He took their good-humoured chaff with good-humour, even made more than once a lively attempt to pretend to respond to their endeavours. But they were all agreed at last that there was really nothing in it.

During the long intrigue with Princess Manelli they had understood their companion's situation very well. He belonged to 'the Manelli.' That was settled. They respected the intrigue, and they all admired the Princess despite her age. She still had a power of cheiting the worship of youth though she did not possess youth. But this long lying fallow of Cesare had made them gossip a great deal among themselves.

Some one said he had a mistress in Paris. But that must be a lie, because for months he had not gone to Paris. Another declared that he had found a lovely contadina in the country, and had hidden her in a cottage on the edge of the Pontine Marshes. But in some mysterious way the 'no' of truth, though not uttered, will often irresistibly force its way into the minds of men. And thus it was with the gay companions of Cesare. Not one of them really believed in that contadina.

Although they sometimes chaffed Cesare they were careful not to go too far. Cesare was a man who imposed a certain respect on other men. He seemed so thoroughly master of himself that no man ever tried to be his master, and though he did not ordinarily appear to be reserved, even his best friends had long ago learnt that he did not choose to have his life pried into by any one.

His absolute reticence, never deviated from, concerning his connection with Princess Manelli had taught every one that lesson.

Most Italian men are secretive, and somewhat mistrustful of others, and Cesare possessed this trait of his countrymen. He was strong enough not to take a confidante, and, if he had a secret, only considered it safe so long as he told it to no one.

Perhaps, after the rupture with Princess Manelli, attended, as it had been, by scenes of despair and violence, of humiliation and fury, Cesare had needed these months of quiescence, which seemed to his friends unnatural. He had passed through fire and had been burned. And the scars of that burning he had carried with him into loneliness, while the Princess went bravely to meet her French friends in Switzerland. The summer after their rupture Cesare had spent chiefly in Lombardy on an estate of his father's, and quite alone with the contadini. He was supposed to be with his people, because he was in Italy, and on Prince Carelli's land. But the Prince and Princess had been at Salsomaggiore, Vallombrosa, and Viareggio, and scarcely at all with their son near Monza. And Cesare had been glad of the solitude. He had felt that he required it, both mentally and physically. For he had not won his way out of the long intrigue with Princess Manelli without a great exertion of the will, and without considerable moral suffering. And his complete secrecy in the whole matter had cost him dear. If he could have told the whole matter to a friend, a much older man, have explained his situation, have asked advice, have been backed up in his action by an opinion that was valuable, the solace would have been great. Although nobody knew it, he had had a long inward struggle before he had come to the resolve to leave Princess Manelli. For years he had secretly longed to be free before he had at last claimed his freedom. Perhaps he would never have claimed it if Dolores had not come to Rome. Almost certainly he would never have claimed it if he had not been so much younger than the Princess. His sense of honour, and perhaps also his deference to the traditions and opinion of his set in Rome, might have kept him dragging his chain. But youth has its riotous energies, its hardnesses, above all its pas-

sionate desire to taste the wine-cup only the golden years can put to the lips of a man. And it has a secret and almost severe understanding of what is owed to it, and of what it owes to itself. Cesare knew that the Princess had done him a cruel wrong in seizing upon his ignorant youth. She might say that Italian boys were men at the age of eighteen. But had that been true of him? He had emerged from the hands of his English tutor to be seized upon by this woman of the world, who was already over thirty, and who knew life *comme sa poche.* He had been but a handsome and spirited child.

She had turned him into a man, and by doing so had taught him what she was, and in what a condition he was living. She had taught him that he was in prison and that she was the jailor. It was a long while before he woke up to the complete understanding of the ugly truth. At first vanity blinded him, and passion blinded him, and he honestly believed he adored Princess Manelli. He was flattered beyond measure because she had picked him out, she who was considered a great *élégante*, who was a leader of the smart world. The good-looking boy loves to *faire figura* among his comrades, and his mind not seldom swaggers. Cesare was very proud of himself at first. He saw himself envied by other men, and he believed himself to be enviable. And the Princess knew how to make appeals that were not to his vanity. She swept him off his feet with her love. But the time came when he touched ground again, the time when he looked out on the freedom of others, when he thought, 'But why am I not free too?'

As so often happens in an intrigue, when the woman is much older and more experienced than the man, Princess Manelli was terribly jealous of Cesare. Her jealousy was founded on fear and her fear was based on reason and her knowledge of life. She knew that it might be difficult for her to keep Cesare, even though she was a charming and a clever woman. She knew that she might have to suffer. She risked that chance. She was a woman who was ready to take risks when her heart spoke. But, in the beginning, she had not known how she was going to love Cesare. When she knew all that he meant in her life, a thousand lives seemed suddenly to bristle up within her, and

every one of them depended for all its happiness on Cesare.

Gradually he came to hate her complete dependence upon him, which he divined. It closed in the horizons about him. It exhausted the air. It dulled the music of life. It shut the doors. Princess Manelli's love was so great, and so essentially passionate, that it occasionally carried her beyond her cleverness. She could not always be clever with Cesare, though for long she had been clever even with him. She had to show herself to him sometimes not as a woman of the world but simply as a woman. And her complete and intense dependence upon him was as a lamp by whose light he came to perceive that he was not dependent on her.

And at last he knew the wrong she had done him.

The young men who were his contemporaries passed from one love affair to another, or they married. He heard their talk in the club, at the theatre, in the hunting-field. And he felt that always there was a reservation in regard to himself when possible marriages, or flirtations, or intrigues were discussed. He 'belonged to the Manelli.' He was out of it all. By slow degrees he grew almost to hate the Princess. And yet he was grateful to her, and he was accustomed to her, and he admired her, and she knew how to give him pleasure. But he wanted his freedom. He needed it. He began to feel as if he had a right to it, and that in her heart Princess Manelli was perpetually, and almost furiously, denying him that right.

In times of great stress people have to act in complete accord with their natural characters. The character of Princess Manelli was essentially imperious, and she was not wrong in thinking that in her nature there was something of a granite texture. When she became mortally afraid because she divined her lover's secret and growing restlessness, therefore, she sought to impose herself upon him by the force of her will, to dominate him by her inflexible determination, almost to sequestrate him by the intensity of her love. She hid her new softness, her cringing terror of the woman who loves too much. She showed the woman who considers that she has a right to possess, and to rule, because of her attractive force and her pride.

This was Princess Mancelli's natural way of asserting herself, in a difficult moment, or period.

The other woman in her seemed almost not herself, bu she began to grow insistent. Nevertheless, using her will determined to be true to herself, the Princess strove reso lutely to hide this stranger, who was yet herself. When he heart was crying 'Don't desert me!' to Cesare, her manne said often, 'You are fortunate to have been chosen by m as my companion.' In her moments of abandonment t passion she was fierce, and even in them imperious.

But there were lapses. Sometimes the fearful, and ever humble woman could not be concealed. Sometimes th naked truth of her was shown. But, in the main, as Cesar grew more restless under the yoke, the Princess sought t press it more firmly upon him. She knew that the really clever woman holds a man to her by cords that seem made of thistledown. But there was the hardness in her character, the pride in her Roman blood. Almost instinctively she rushed to find chains for Cesare's binding. The fight was engaged between heart and brain, and the heart conquered.

And then Dolores appeared in Rome.

The peculiar and almost romantic softness which was a characteristic of the true Dolores, the Dolores unwarped, had made a curious appeal to Cesare. But it had done more. It had shown him clearly the whole of his manhood. It had taught him that this manhood had never been allowed free play. The true man ought to take, but he had been taken; to make the advance towards the sacred citadel, but he had been captured. To his restlessness was added a cold self-contempt. What had Rome been thinking of him all these long years? He saw himself at last as a prey, himself —a man. It is a man's business—he said to himself—to conquer the woman he loves. But he had been conquered by a determined woman. With new and terrible eyes he now looked upon Princess Mancelli. That she loved him was not enough. Men excuse very little in love when they themselves do not love. And when a woman would turn into fire, a man often turns into iron.

Beneath the yoke that pressed heavily upon him Cesare began to turn into iron.

Had the Denzils not been in Rome Cesare might not have

been more than strongly attracted by Dolores. But when he believed that she was deserted—in the sense of the only real desertion—by her husband he began to love her. And from this love he drew the strength to burst his bonds, and to obtain his freedom. And with the bursting of his bonds he felt as if, for the first time, he came fully into his manhood as into a great inheritance.

He had to rest with it, to grow accustomed to it, before he used it. The new criticism of his Rome, which, he quite understood, must be turned upon him because of his treatment of Princess Manelli, did not seriously affect him. For he was free of that other criticism which his now conscious manhood had chafed under. They might speak against him and say he was cruel now they could no longer speak against him because he was weak. The code of honour did not permanently trouble him, not because he was devoid of a sense of honour, but because, in his new love, he realised how false the world's standard in that matter frequently is. And he was not made to suffer much because he was saved by the Princess Manelli's pride. She said not a word against him. And so not very much had been said against him in Rome.

So the months passed and Cesare lived with his freedom, and his lack of freedom; with his liberty of the man who was no longer bound fast to a woman by unsanctioned ties, and his lack of liberty of the man whose heart cannot stray because it is anchored. It seemed that he dwelt in calm, and his companions wondered. And the Princess Manelli watched. And Sir Theodore Cannynge began to live in the life at Frascati.

About the time of the party at Mrs. Eldridge's at which Dolores had seen the little doll-like girl, however, Cesare became aware that his mother was once more beginning to 'make plans' for his future. In former days both she and his father had spoken very plainly to him with regard to matrimony, and had done their best to force him to marry. Repeated failures had induced a long quiescence on their part, and Cesare had ceased to fear their energies. He thought that his obstinacy had conquered their hopes, and that they had finally decided to let him alone.

But now he began to understand that something had caused

his mother to plan a fresh campaign against her only son's celibacy, and that she was going to conduct it with less frankness than had attended her previous efforts to settle him in life. She said not a word to him about marrying, but one afternoon, in a weary voice, she remarked:

'It is so tiresome! I have been obliged to promise to chaperone a girl to the Caltanizetti's to-night.'

'Have you, mamma? What girl?' asked Cesare, quite unsuspecting.

'Little Ursula Montebruno. The mother is ill as usual, and Giorgio came on an embassy about it from his cousin.'

'Giorgio Montebruno?'

'Yes.'

'I thought he was in Nice.'

'No. He was in here yesterday. I know Giorgio so well that I couldn't get out of it.'

'Povera mamma,' said Cesare kindly, but rather negligently.

The Princess was given to complaining, especially in the family circle.

Cesare did not go to the Caltanizetti's, and thought no more of the matter till he found that his mother was chaperoning Donna Ursula at another party at Mrs. Eldridge's, and then that she had agreed to 'take the little thing about' with her till the end of the season, as poor Minna Montebruno—the mother—was a complete wreck, and would not be able to hold up her head for months in all probability.

'And she's quite a nice little thing,' the Princess added languidly. 'And not a bit spoilt.'

'Why should she be spoilt?' asked Cesare, without much interest.

'Well, she's the greatest heiress in Italy. All the Mullins money is coming to her.'

'Really!' said Cesare, with an air of complete indifference.

He realised that probably his mother was once more plotting to marry him to a big 'dot,' but it never occurred to him that Montebruno or Princess Manelli had anything to do with the matter. He believed that the Princess's one desire was that he should never speak to another woman now that he had left her. For he knew her jealousy, even to its depths. And he knew, too, that Montebruno was an

old, and apparently a devoted friend of hers. Princess Carelli had no more idea than Cesare of Princess Mancelli's part in the matter of Donna Ursula. She so disliked Princess Mancelli that she would have preferred to see her son remain a celibate for ever rather than see him marry because Princess Mancelli wished it. But it never occurred to her that the Princess could wish such a thing. Princess Mancelli had, Princess Carelli thought, tried to ruin Cesare's life. Such a woman could not desire to see the ruin pieced together, restored, by another woman or girl. The fact that Giorgio Montebruno had first put it into Princess Carelli's head that Donna Ursula might do very well for Cesare as a wife did not wake the Princess's suspicions. Montebruno was an old friend of so many women that his strange affection for Princess Mancelli was not suspected in Rome. He looked quite incapable of a strong affection. And his family and the Princess's were old and almost legendary allies. Of course he was hereditarily fond of Lisetta. That meant nothing. And Montebruno had always been intimate with Princess Carelli, as he was with nearly everybody. He had never suggested to her that Donna Ursula would do for Cesare. He had only deplored the perpetual illnesses of his cousin, Giacomo's wife, and casually hinted that it was dangerous for the greatest heiress in Rome to be so little looked after. And he had wondered whether Princess Carelli would chaperone Ursula to the Caltanizettis. It would be the child's first party, and it was important she should appear under good auspices.

Princess Carelli's mind had been set going, like a watch. And now it ticked on vigorously. Although she had 'given Cesare up' she was quite ready to make one last campaign against his obstinate celibacy. And the thought of little Ursula's immense 'dot' roused in her the strange and ugly avarice so often manifested by rich people. Besides, as she often said with a dry plaintiveness, 'In these days of American millionaires no Italian is rich. We are all picturesque paupers with lovely names, trying to pretend we can afford the necessaries of life, when we know quite well we can't.' So Princess Carelli set to work with a will, disguised under her habitual manner of languid indifference, to try to carry into effect the wishes of Princess Mancelli.

Women have strange lacunæ in their jealousies. Princess Mancelli had looked once on the fair hair, blue eyes, narrow figure and flat little head of Donna Ursula, and at once had known that she could never be jealous of her. It was as if her body had cried the truth aloud, and her soul had at once accepted it—on the evidence of the body. It was the way Donna Ursula's head went into her neck that had made the Princess know she could never be jealous of her. In that straight line there was something cold, unimaginative, limited, and hard in a small way which the Princess accepted at a glance and without mental parley.

'Cesare shall marry, and he shall marry that doll!' she had said to herself.

At Mrs. Eldridge's party she had looked from Donna Ursula to Dolores, and she had felt within herself two extremes, like Heaven and Hell, she thought. She had seen Cesare belonging to the one—and to the other, ice-bound and fire-bound. And all that was imperious and all that was violent within her had risen up to decree the marriage of the doll to the man who had rejected her fire. For the first time since Cesare had abandoned her she felt again a very faint thrill of the zest of life at her heart. She even—for what wild dreams do not flash through the heart of the woman who loves?—had a quick vision of Cesare learning through Donna Ursula what he had thrown away when he broke from Lisetta Mancelli.

But Dolores Cannynge! When Princess Mancelli thought of Dolores with Cesare she knew that there were some things which no woman ought to be made to endure, however much she may have sinned. And from this time she set Dolores apart.

'Any one but Dolores Cannynge!' she said to herself, and most often when she lay awake in the night. 'Any one but Dolores Cannynge!'

Her woman's instinct divined the exact truth of her lover's desire. He wanted the opposite of her, Lisetta Mancelli. And Dolores was her opposite. When they had sat together in the Palazzo Urbino she had felt almost sternly conscious of the power of her nature, and of the romantic softness of Dolores. She had known that she had the strong fibre of the ruler. And then had come to her the thought,

'And you! Are you not born to yield, and to be [illegible], sheltered, perhaps worshipped by strength?' And a cold sensation of impotence had slipped through her. For something had surely told her in that moment the root-cause of the rupture between Cesare and herself. They were too much akin. In both of them was the fibre of the ruler. Her imperious strength at last had offended the strength in her lover. He had learnt to hate something that was almost of himself which he had discerned in her.

She knew now how mad she had been when she had striven to make her yoke hard upon Cesare's shoulders.

Princess Manelli was superstitious. She laughed at omens, but there was something in her, from of old surely and ineradicable, which believed in them. And Nanna fostered this something. Princess Manelli would have smiled had any one hinted to her that ignorant Nanna could possibly influence her mind. But so it was. Nanna, with her eyes of a sorceress and her beliefs of Trastevere, and her deep and exclusive love, meant a good deal to the Princess. And Nanna believed in omens, and indeed in almost everything that was entirely unscientific and that could never be proved to be a truth.

As the night of the Giamarcho bridge tournament drew close Princess Manelli became possessed of a conviction. She felt certain that she and Dolores would find themselves opponents in the final struggle for that jewel on which, as she had said to Mrs. Eldridge, she had set her heart. It was a beautiful jewel, a curiously cut emerald in a setting of jade, very original and very effective. But the Princess had quantities of jewels. She wanted this one because she believed that its loss to Dolores would be ominous. If she and Dolores fought for it, and Dolores won it, that would be a bad omen for her. In the night, when she could not sleep, she dwelt upon this idea till it became almost an obsession. At one moment she saw herself wearing the jewel. At another it gleamed in its curious pale setting on the long and graceful neck of the woman she had begun to fear. She resolved, with a secret violence, to win it. Sometimes she said to herself that probably Dolores Cannynge and she would not play against each other in the tournament. Lady Cannynge and her partner might be put out by another

pair long before the final was reached. Or she, Princess Mancelli, might draw an impossible partner and be beaten in the first game. The chances were perhaps against her meeting Lady Cannynge as an adversary. Nevertheless she felt quite certain that the fight for the jewel would eventually lie between her and Lady Cannynge.

She gathered together all her force in the resolve that the jewel should be hers.

That she played better than Lady Cannynge she knew. But Lady Cannynge was improving every day. Princess Mancelli was able to mark that fact, for between the night of the Eldridge reception and the night of the tournament they played together nearly every afternoon in one house or another. And each afternoon it seemed to the Princess that Lady Cannynge played a little better than the afternoon before.

Dolores, too, wanted to win the jewel. If she did it would mean a success, that she had achieved something at which she had definitely aimed. A poor little aim! a poor little unmeaning success! Perhaps so. But it would be something to reach any goal. And if everything she really wanted—more needed—was taken from her, then she must try to get some little thing for herself. A jewel in jade! She must try to get that.

She did not tell her husband of her small ambition. In her heart, perhaps, she was crying over it as a mother, bereft of her child, might cry over the doll—that could stay. She felt Sir Theodore's complete separation in mind from all the things in which she was now concerned. She even felt that with every day he moved further away from her life. But she made no effort to join him.

For, often she seemed to be conscious of the movement of the current of her life, setting away from all that she needed irresistibly.

She tried to put all her heart into bridge. She tried to set all her heart on that jewel.

On the night of the tournament she dined alone with her husband. Theo was never at Frascati at night. But she dined out very often. She had offered never to dine out, but her husband had begged her to do as she liked in words she had not forgotten. He had said:

'Remember, Doloretta, I shall never wish you to give up anything that brings innocent pleasure into your life. I don't think I have anything of the kill-joy in me. I know you understand my occupations and duties. And I can quite realise what your pleasures mean to you. If I cannot always share them you must say to yourself, "He 's a good many years older than I am."'

That was the first time Sir Theodore had spoken of the difference in their ages as if it must set them apart the one from the other. The thought shot through the mind of Dolores.

'Is he going to make that an—excuse?'

'Then I will dine out sometimes, Theo,' she had answered. 'The season will soon be over.'

'Where are you going to-night, Doloretta?' said Sir Theodore, as they sat down to dinner.

'To a party at Princess Gianfarcho's.'

'You look so naughty serious, so determined, that I fancied some extraordinary matter must be in the wind.'

'No,' she said.

She did not choose to tell him just then about the tournament. He would think it such a paltry affair.

'Is it to be a big party?' Sir Theodore asked, with a clever, but of course utterly useless attempt at seeming interested.

'I believe so.'

'The Grand Duke, I suppose?'

'Oh yes. He is going everywhere. But he is only in Rome for a fortnight.'

'I met him in the Campagna to-day, motoring with the little Boccara—one mass of extraordinary veils.'

'He admires her, I believe.'

'I nearly stopped the motor and begged her to give us the dance of the seven veils in that marvellous setting.'

'She would have been delighted. And she dances beautifully.'

'Not so well as Marchesa—— though,' said Sir Theodore, mentioning a very pretty woman who had once made a sensation in Rome by appearing as the moon in a charity ballet at the Teatro Argentina.

'No. How is Theo getting on with his fencing?'

'Wonderfully well for such a child. Erdardi is delighted with him, but far too martial to say so.'

'I suppose he will soon be going to school, won't he?'

'To school!' Sir Theodore said, rather sharply, as if he were startled.

'Or does Edna mean to educate him out here?'

'No doubt he will go to school in England eventually. I think Edna will be guided by me in the matter, as I am Theo's guardian. But there is plenty of time.'

Dolores knew that she had touched upon a subject which already had troubled her husband's mind. But something in her felt cruel, and she continued:

'I am sure Francis would have sent his son to a public school. He was such a thorough Englishman.'

'Francis told me of his wishes concerning Theo before he died,' said Sir Theodore. 'And of course I shall be careful to carry them out. But Theo is only nine. So, as I said before, there is plenty of time.'

There was a short silence. Dolores had realised how fond her husband had become of little Theo, how already he dreaded the moment when the child would leave the home nest, and go out to be made, or marred, by contact with others, with strangers who would become his friends, or perhaps his enemies, but who, in any case, must influence him for good or for evil. If she had given her husband a son—ah! how different everything would have been! How Theodore would have worshipped her as the mother of his son, the giver to him of the great gift he had always longed for! She hated little Theo in her husband's life. She could not help it. Edna was little Theo's mother.

'What time do you expect to be back, Doloretta?' said Sir Theodore at last.

'Very late, I think. We are going to play bridge.'

'Oh!'

He helped himself to some claret.

'Should you mind if Theo stayed here to-morrow night?' he said, after a minute. 'He could sleep in the little blue room. He has his fencing lesson late, and Erdardi has a sort of tournament for his pupils in the evening. Theo is longing to go to it, and I thought it would be better if——'

'Of course let him sleep here. I—shall love to have him. Perhaps Edna will come too?'

'Oh no,' said Sir Theodore hastily.

'Does she never come to Rome?'

'She hasn't as yet. And—well, she told me she couldn't come to our apartment for a long time, because of the sad memories connected with it.'

'I understand. That's very natural.'

There was another pause. Sir Theodore looked across the table twice at his wife. She felt certain he had something in his mind which he wished to speak of to her. She did not know what it was. But she supposed it must be connected with the family at Frascati. She was beginning to understand a little more every day—sometimes it seemed to her every moment—how concentrated Theodore was becoming on the Denzils. Whatever he and she might be talking of she knew he was thinking of them. And she fully realised that the more Theodore did for the Denzils the more he would love them. In time Frances's death would perhaps almost seem to Theodore the event which had given birth to his own real life. Not for a long time could that be, but Dolores foresaw that it might be—at last.

Although Sir Theodore evidently had something, probably important, that he wished to say he did not say it. And Dolores put on her cloak to go to the Gramarcho's, still wondering what it was.

'Good-night, Theo,' she said.

She stood in such a way that it was impossible for him to know that she wished him to kiss her, equally impossible for him to be sure that she did not.

'But I expect I shall still be up when you come back,' he said.

'I shall be very late, I know.'

'Why so specially late to-night?'

'We are having a bridge tournament. And of course that takes time.'

Sir Theodore had come quite close to his wife. And she believed he was going to kiss her. But at her words he made a slight movement away from her. It was very slight, but it meant a lost kiss.

'A tournament!' he said. 'Well, I hope you may win it.'

As Dolores went down the great staircase to get into the motor she felt almost as if the expression of her husband's hope had killed her own desire.

Did she wish any longer to win that jewel?

CHAPTER XXII

THE Giamarchos lived in Palazzo Chigi looking on Piazza Colonna. They had large estates in Tuscany, and for Italians were rich. The Prince was dull and suffered from colds. And the Princess was a *poetesse*, a phenomenon unusual among Italians. But she was handsome and smart, and had known every one in Rome all her life, having been born a Lantini, and a member of the older branch of that old and famous family. And she had been admired by a very great personage, apparently with the approval of the Prince, who had influenza so often that he almost ceased to count. So a party in Palazzo Chigi was an event which brought what the *Italie* called the "tout-Rome" together, and nobody who received an invitation refused it.

The apartments in Roman palaces are usually immense, and the Giamarcho apartment was no exception to the general rule. Multitudes of people who were not going to play in the tournament put in an appearance, but they were supposed to keep away religiously from the great room decorated with Flemish tapestries in which the bridge tables were arranged. The players entered the palace and disappeared, while the other guests dispersed through the rooms to talk, or in a distant gallery listened to Schizzi's band, which performed in a painted alcove decorated with flowering shrubs. But details of the progress made in the tournament leaked out as the night wore on, and the players who were already put out of the handicap emerged to receive consolation from their friends, from Schizzi, and from an excellent buffet.

Mrs. Eldridge, who played abominably, being too intellectual for cards, was the first to come out of the sacrosanct

room, with her partner, Mr. Belton. And they were shortly followed by Countess Boccara, in an extremely bad temper, with her Grand Duke. The latter personage was taken possession of by his hostess, while the little Countess was quickly surrounded by anxious young men, full of instincts that had surely descended from the Good Samaritan. She sat down on a hard chair with a gilded back, and looked crossly around her.

'Who is going to win, *cara* Contessa?' asked Prince Perreto, who had not entered for the tournament.

'Chi lo sa?' returned the Countess, with a coldly bored intonation.

'Well, but tell us who has drawn whom?' said Perreto. You were honoured of course by——'

'Honoured!' interrupted Countess Boccara, in a decidedly acid voice. 'Imagine! He——'

She poured forth a catalogue of the Grand Duke's mistakes. Perhaps expression relieved her temper, for she eventually became a little more amiable, and condescended to satisfy the curiosity of her circling admirers.

'The Tomtit? He's got Marchesa Verosti, and Hereward and Princess Bartoldi are partners. They beat us owing to *his*——' The catalogue received additions and amplifications. 'But of course Lisetta and her partner are bound to win, unless Dolores Cannynge plays up as she never has till now.'

'But who are their partners? Who are their men?' exclaimed Carlo Vitali. '*Cara* Contessa, a flaming sword has driven you out of Paradise to make a Paradise for us poor mortals here. Be merciful to us! Tell us what is going on——'

'Under the tree of knowledge,' interjected Perreto.

Vitali looked cross. He tried to shine and greatly disliked to have his effects intercepted. He now felt that he had been about to say what Prince Perreto had said. That this was not the fact did not subdue his ill-humour. But while he cast about for a *mot* Countess Boccara became informing.

'Lisetta has Verrall and Dolores Cannynge has Montebruno,' she said.

A Homeric combat!' said Perreto, pressing his hands together and separating them.

'Such luck for both of them!' Countess Boccara continued. 'If only I had had Montebruno or Verrall, I must have won. I play over so much better than Dolores Cannynge, and almost as well as Lisetta, quite as well on my good days. And to-night I know I should have been at my very best. I feel it. It is too disgusting.'

'It is your own fault, my dear Countess,' murmured a French attaché.

'Why?' she demanded, looking into his eyes, 'taking a header to bring up a compliment,' as an Englishman standing by afterwards described it to a friend.

The Frenchman held her eyes for a moment.

'La joie fait peur. It is your own fault if His Imperial Highness was not able to command all his resources to-night.'

'You always talk such utter nonsense, *terre-à-terre*,' exclaimed the Countess, in a voice the sharp edge of which began to be dulled. 'But he certainly did play his very worst for some reason or other.'

'Of course he did!' exclaimed Vitali, anxious to regain his intellectual position. '*Cara* Contessa, is it possible that you do not yet know how disturbing you are?'

He gazed at her waist, which was encircled by a gold band not very much bigger than a bracelet.

'In London they would arrest you,' he added softly.

'Why?' asked Countess Boccara, taking another 'header,' this time into Vitali's black eyes.

'As a disturber of the peace,' he answered, speaking in excellent English.

Some of the men began to make small bets on the result of the tournament. Every one was agreed that Princess Mancelli and Verrall, or Lady Cannynge and Montebruno, must prove the winners, unless the cards ran in an altogether extraordinary way. The great question was whether Montebruno's known skill would counterbalance Princess Mancelli's superiority over Lady Cannynge. When the discussion was at its height Cesare Cardlli came into the room alone. He had just arrived. Countess Boccara saw him at once, as she saw at once every young man who came within the range of her vision.

'Cesare, come here!' she commanded.

'What is it, Contessa?' asked Cesare, bending to kiss her hand, with his air of strong and manly politeness.

'Which would you bet upon to win the bridge tournament, Lisetta and Mr. Verrall, or Dolores Cannynge and Montebruno?'

She held her pretty head slightly on one side. There was an almost monkey-like expression of mischief in her little sharp, but frivolous, face, which never looked thoughtful, but never looked stupid.

The eyes of the men fixed themselves on Cesare.

'You know how Lisetta plays,' Countess Boccara added.

'Yes,' said Cesare calmly. 'But I don't know Lady Cannynge's game.'

'But surely—haven't you ever played with her?'

'No, never.'

'It doesn't matter! Which will you bet on? We are all having our little wagers. You lay one with me.'

'Why not? What shall it be?'

Countess Boccara looked swiftly round, to see if all the men were appreciating her mischief. That some might consider it to be in bad taste did not trouble her at all.

'You propose the terms!' she said in a moment, turning again to Cesare.

'Oh no! It is for you to choose them. I am prepared to fall in with whatever proposal you make.'

'No, no! I am sick of always having my own way. I wish you to suggest a bet to me.'

'If I do you will be having your own way once more.'

'How tiresome you are! I wish *you* to have your way. Bet on whichever couple you expect to win.'

'But if I don't know anything about Lady Cannynge's game!'

'I'll tell you. She plays about a third less well than Lisetta.'

'I was always a classic, never a mathematician.'

Cesare had assumed an expression almost as mischievous in its masculine way as the Countess's.

'What have mathematics——?' she began.

But at this moment from the bridge room came Princess

Bartoldi and Hereward Arnold. Countess Boccara turned eagerly towards them.

'Who beat you?' she said.

'Lady Cannynge and Montebruno,' said the Princess, with a smile and a charming gesture which seemed to say whimsically that she had no more to expect from fate.

She passed on, but Arnold, twisting his moustache with a hand that looked hot and angry, said:

'Lady Cannynge is playing like——' he paused abruptly.

'Comme le diable?' suggested Perreto.

'Exactly! I never knew her play could be so good as it is to-night. Montebruno, with his cold determination, must have inspired her. We hadn't a chance. And yet the cards were with us.'

He stared at Countess Boccara, but it was evident that for once he did not see her.

'Perhaps if I hadn't——'

'For Heaven's sake don't give us a list of all your mistakes, Hereward!' she interrupted. 'Now, Cesare! Whom will you back?'

'The Contessa thinks Princess Manelli and Mr. Verrall must win,' interposed Vitali, speaking to Cesare almost in a whisper.

He meant to give Carlo a hint what to do in order to please the Countess. But she overheard him and exclaimed:

'Don't interfere, Carlo!'

But Cesare had received his excuse to do what secretly he wished to do, and he gripped it.

'If you think the Princess and Verrall must win, Contessa,' he murmured, with gentle amiability, 'I will bet against them, of course.'

'But I——'

'I will bet you a hundred lire to fifty, or a thousand lire to five hundred, that Lady Cannynge and Montebruno win the prize.'

'I never said I thought Lisetta would win!' said the Countess almost viciously.

'Contessa!' a small chorus of protest arose.

'Will you take my bet?' said Cesare.

'Very well! A thousand to five hundred. But I never——'

'Contessa! Contessa!' said the chorus, almost *bouche fermée*, and led by Perreto.

'A thousand to five hundred that Lady Cannynge and Montebruno are the winners in the final!' said Cesare, in a firm and inexpressive voice.

And before the Countess could say another word, he turned and walked away.

'What a monkey she is!' he was thinking.

Did she really suspect his secret? He did not feel sure of that. Probably she only guessed that he admired Lady Cannynge's appearance, and wished to find out if there was anything behind her guess. He had been so careful, had held his desires, his passions, so tightly in leash. But oh! those cursed watching eyes of the world!

He entered a small, but very high and circular room, which was used by Gianarelio as a smoking-room. There was nobody in it. He sat down and lit a cigarette.

This eternal prudence! His love for Dolores was accumulating in it as the money of a minor accumulates during a long minority. He compared his secrecy with what he believed to be the almost blatant indifference to opinion of Sir Theodore, and it seemed to him that he was as delicate as Sir Theodore was indelicate in action. Why was he so restrained? Was it from fear of Lisetta? What would she—what could she do if he showed his love for another woman? He knew, as he sat there alone, that something in Dolores had inspired his caution, the long restraint which was beginning to torture his fiery nature. Something delicate and mysterious in her personality had made him very delicate, very secret in relation to her. He did not think she loved him. After his experience with Princess Manelli he almost adored the soft aloofness of Dolores. It set a task before him. He had to win her. The morality of the whole question did not trouble him at all. To his hot blood it seemed quite unnatural that a woman as young, and as beautiful, as Dolores, should live a loveless life. It was her right to have a lover if her husband neglected her for another woman.

Every one knew that Sir Theodore's motor was for ever traversing the Campagna to Frascati.

And now, at this moment, 'mamma' began once again a matrimonial campaign against him—Cesare! It was almost as if she had divined that her son's heart had fixed itself—she would have said 'again'—on a married woman. She was there to-night with Donna Ursula.

Cesare moved restlessly, knocked the ash off his cigarette, threw one leg across the other. How he longed to burst all the bonds of etiquette, all the strands of convention, to catch up Dolores in his arms and carry her away from the watching eyes, from everybody. The Pontine Marshes came before his imagination, the wild, the desolate places, the river mouth, the long seashore. He loved the open. To have it—with Dolores!

Would she beat Lisetta?

He too, like Princess Mancelli, began to think of that combat of cards as strangely important, began to feel as if its result would be ominous. If Dolores won, then Lisetta was conquered. Was she not already conquered by Dolores in another battle? For Lisetta had fought for his heart, had fought like a tigress to keep him.

Quite simply Cesare acknowledged in his thought his supreme value in the life of Lisetta. He was not specially conceited, perhaps, but he knew very well that most women considered him in his youth, strength, vigour, attractive and desirable. He was not inclined to self-depreciation. That sort of thing in his view was unmanly. He was quite sure that a great many women in Rome secretly wanted him.

He set Dolores apart from all those women. He loved her, but not because she had chosen him out, because she had meant him to love her, because she had wanted him. He had to make her want him. That was partly why he loved her.

Soon the Roman season would be over. All these people, who now were crowded together in Rome, would disperse. Where would Dolores go? And where Sir Theodore? Would the summer be his—Cesare's—opportunity? That was what for long he had been secretly hoping. And lately he had heard a rumour that Cannynge was trying to get a villa for the summer at Frascati. If that were true then

surely his opportunity must come, unless Lady Cannynge consented to go to Frascati for the *villeggiatura*. And that was more than any woman, with even a trace of pride, would consent to do, he supposed.

Would the omen be favourable? Would Lisetta be beaten? Cesare felt within him a strong excitement, almost boyish, which his outward man did not show.

A friend of his came into the smoking-room, sat down and talked to him. Soon afterwards he got up, and once more joined the crowd in the suite of drawing-rooms.

It was getting late, but no one went away. It seemed an understood thing that everybody would await the result of the tournament.

More players had come out from the bridge room. Presently the rumour went about that the final was on, and that it lay between Princess Mazzelli and Verrall, Lady Cannynge and Montebruno.

The little world gathered in the Giannarcho apartment professed a keen excitement, and "suggestioned" perhaps by their own profession, presently became genuinely interested in, even excited about, the result. Those who had made wagers pretended lightly to tremble for their money. Several very young men who clung to their small means began to feel really anxious. And Cesare, deep down in his heart, was concentrated on the omen, though he was pretending to talk to Donna Ursula Montebruno, having been captured by his mother quite cleverly and naturally.

He did not care for the little thing. Her blonde freshness, her doll-like daintiness did not attract him. And her almost hard self-possession seemed to him repellent. But there was an odd little determination about her which prevented her from being a nobody, even in his eyes. She seemed to him neither Italian nor American, but a doll without nationality, who, however, knew her own value, and, not in a wholly vulgar spirit, would probably use her knowledge to gain any little ends she might chance to have in view. That he might be one of them did not trouble him. She was a doll, and he was a strong man, who had lost and regained his freedom. As to his mother, she had tried to make him marry before and she had failed.

Schizzi's band played better and better, and Schizzi him-

self was induced by champagne to be fervent on the violin as only he could be. But people were distrait. They wanted to know the result of the tournament. And it was nearly two o'clock in the morning.

'I can't stay any longer,' observed Princess Carelli, looking dark and weary, and slightly drawing down her flat nostrils. 'Cesare, do go and ask for the motor.'

'But doesn't Donna Ursula wish to wait for the result?' he said.

He knew what getting the motor for his mother would mean, probably at least half an hour's hovering in the hall. Princess Carelli was fearfully slow in all her proceedings. She would be in the cloakroom for ten minutes, and then would find last words to say to innumerable friends at the top of the stairs, probably at the bottom also.

'I don't mind,' returned the girl, in a cold soprano voice. 'What does it matter who wins? None of us will get that jewel.'

Cesare looked down at her almost sternly with his large black eyes. Donna Ursula returned his glance. And he thought that her bright blue eyes, though inexpressive compared with most people's eyes, looked oddly arbitrary. A sudden sharp antagonism against the little narrow-limbed creature was born in him. But he only said:

'I will fetch your footman, mamma. And then I must find Countess Boccara. She and I have a bet on the result of the tournament. So we are not able to be so disinterested as you and Donna Ursula.'

'But surely you can take us to the motor,' began Princess Carelli, drawling out her words. 'Countess Boccara - - -'

At this moment there was a slight stir. The band had ceased playing.

'Is it finished?' said some one.

'Who has won?' said another.

Then several voices, speaking together, exclaimed:

'Who has won?'

There was a general movement, in which Cesare found himself, quite naturally, separated by two or three people from his mother and Donna Ursula. He then began to increase the gap between himself and them by his own almost instinctive efforts. Very soon they were out of his sight.

He felt that, perhaps for the first time in his life, he had failed in courtesy towards his mother. But she was really maddening sometimes, with her plans and her meagre plots. If only she would leave him alone! Suddenly he was conscious of an almost hot anger against her such as he had never felt before, and had never thought to feel. It replaced something that had been a quiet amusement in his mind.

He wanted to be let alone. After all his years of close bondage surely he had a right to govern himself and his own life, if only for a little while.

He looked away to the left and saw Dolores at some distance coming slowly in his direction. And at once he knew that she had won the jewel.

She looked rather tired, and there was in her face a sort of strong excitement, controlled, which made her more expressive even than usual. There was a little red in her cheeks, her large eyes were shining and her lips smiling. Yet Cesare thought, as he looked at her drawing slowly nearer and speaking to people here and there, he had never before noticed how pathetic her eyes and her lips naturally were. There was something almost childish in both, even at this moment. He had heard people in Roman society say that she was getting to look hard, and add that no doubt her husband's devotion to the Frascati *ménage* accounted for that fact. But now he said to himself that Dolores never could look really hard. As she came nearer he saw that she was wearing the jewel set in jade. Montebruno was close behind her.

Cesare made his way towards her.

'I congratulate you on your triumph,' he said.

As he saw the sharp gleam of the emerald at her throat, again he felt as if this victory were an omen.

'I had Marchese Montebruno as my partner,' Dolores answered. 'I feel it is absurd for me to receive congratulations.'

'But you have been playing wonderfully to-night, I hear.'

'I believe I did play my best.'

She glanced round. Montebruno was farther away now, speaking to some friends.

'Marchese Montebruno had an odd influence,' she said.

People, their curiosity satisfied, were beginning quickly to disperse.

'In what way?' Cesare asked her.

Dolores lowered her voice.

'I felt as if he wished me not to win although he was my partner, and that made me play my very best. He roused my fighting spirit.'

Cesare looked at the two red spots in her cheeks.

'You have a fighting spirit?' he said.

'It seems so. I scarcely knew I had till to-night.'

There was a sound in her voice he had not heard before.

'But did Montebruno play badly then?'

'No. He couldn't. But I think he tried to.'

He looked at her in silence. Perhaps something in his eyes made her continue rather quickly,

'But I mustn't say these absurd things. You will forget them, I know.'

'When?'

'Now, please!'

'They are forgotten.'

Some one spoke to her. She turned away smiling, and was separated from him by people who came up to congratulate her. A minute afterwards he saw Princess Manecelli saying good-bye to Prince Gramarcho. She, too, was smiling and was talking with her usual completely self-possessed animation. Montebruno was now close to her, looking cold, weary, a man without hope or fear. Cesare gazed at him with a new, almost hard interest. Was Lady Cannynge right? Had Montebruno wished to bring about her defeat in the tournament, and had his instinctive passion for cards, his instinctive skill, refusing to be controlled, asserted themselves in opposition to his desire?

Princess Manecelli spoke to Dolores, took her hand, pressed it, turned round to go away. Montebruno joined her. Just as the Princess was nearing a great doorway which led into a further drawing-room through which she had to pass to go to the cloakroom, she looked round and met Cesare's eyes. Immediately she stopped, and beckoned to him, making also a little characteristic movement of her head. Cesare went to her. Montebruno glanced at Cesare, nodded, and walked very slowly on. Cesare took the Princess's

hand and bent over it. He seemed to touch her glove with his lips.

'I met Countess Boccara as I came out of the bridge room,' the Princess said.

'Yes?' said Cesare, meeting her piercing eyes steadily.

'She told me you were kind enough to bet a thousand lire to five hundred against me. I only wanted to thank you. Good night, Carelli.'

She spoke in a level, unemotional voice. And as she finished speaking she gave him a little familiar smile, and left him. He saw her join Montebruno in the further room and walk slowly away with him. They disappeared in the vista of drawing-rooms. Cesare stood for a minute looking after them.

'Could Lisetta hate me?' he thought.

A moment afterwards, as he went to find his mother, he thought:

'Does she hate me?'

CHAPTER XXIII

When Dolores started for Palazzo Barberini it was between two and three o'clock in the morning. She did not know she was tired. She was strongly excited, and her excitement shed through her a sort of feverish life, which made the darkness, the emptiness, of sleep's almost midmost hour seem vivid and strangely intense. She had done what she had meant to do. She had won. The jewel that was the symbol of her triumph was on her neck. She pulled off her long glove, put up her hand, unfastened her cloak and felt it. When she got into the motor she had turned off the electric light. Now in the darkness her fingers clasped tightly over the emerald and its setting of jade. How hard jewel and setting were! She thought they felt ugly. But she kept her fingers upon them. And, almost immediately, their hardness made her think again of Montebruno. Why had

she told Cesare Carelli of her feeling about Montebruno in the tournament? She knew he would never let any one know what she had said. It did not occur to her for a moment to doubt him. Nevertheless she was angry with herself for having spoken to him unguardedly. But in her poor little triumph she had felt dreadfully alone. In the bridge room it had seemed to her sometimes as if she were fighting not only her adversaries but also her own partner. And when she and Montebruno had won had she not beaten three people? She had felt a hardness in her victory until she had stood by Cesare. And then — —

The motor stopped under the arcade of the palace.

As Dolores went up the great stone staircase, accompanied by the footman who held a little electric light, she wondered whether Theodore would be awake and know of her late return. Since he had given up going out, and she had gone out so much, they had begun to occupy separate bedrooms. It disturbed him when she came back very late in the night, although he never went to bed early. She had been the first to suggest the new arrangement. And she had done this because she had felt as if Theodore wished to do it, but would not for fear of hurting her feelings. He had assented, but almost as if reluctantly. She thought that his reluctance had come from the fact that she had taken the initiative in the matter. But she was not quite sure.

Perhaps she was determined not to be quite sure of that.

As the footman put the key into the front door of the apartment she remembered a night when she had sat waiting for her husband, had called out to him directly he entered. How long ago that seemed! The door shut behind her. She walked towards her bedroom.

She could have gained it without going into the green and red drawing-room, which adjoined her husband's sitting-room. And she had meant to do so when she came into the hall. But now she paused at the turning of the wide corridor close to the entrance to the reception rooms. She felt as if her husband was still up, and was not in his bedroom. After standing still for a moment it seemed to her that she knew he was sitting up. And, with a mind peculiarly alive, she recalled his manner at dinner, her conviction that he

had had something, probably important, to say to her. He had not said it. Was he sitting up, perhaps, in order to tell it to her now?

She turned away from the corridor, and made her way into the green and red drawing-room. As she switched on the electric light the painted eyes of the Lenbach portrait met hers, with a scrutiny that seemed fierce. The snaky veins on the almost transparent temples looked dreadfully alive. She was almost startled by this old man, whose intellect was presented by the genius of the painter like a writhing force taken from his hooded basket by a charmer of snakes. What did he want of her? Or—what did he think about her with his pitilessly acute old mind?

She passed him, almost drawing her skirts away, opened the door of her husband's room and looked in.

She had been right. He was still up. His room was lit rather faintly by two movable reading lamps covered with red shades. By a revolving bookcase, in which he always kept the volumes he was interested in at the moment, he was sitting in a large and deep armchair, with his long limbs stretched out, and his arms lying along his body and legs, with the hands just touching each other. He was not reading. His head, in an odd position, leaned towards his left shoulder against the back of the chair. She had a moment of terror, thinking, 'Is he dead?'

Then she saw that he had fallen asleep.

He was always a very silent sleeper. But Dolores, approaching gently, holding her gown with both hands, could hear a faint sound of his breathing. She stood still and looked at him; at the brown, sharply-cut face, the thick hair with its silver threads lying almost in slabs along the sensitive forehead, the moustache and pointed beard which suited his features, the artistic brown hands, the long limbs. And as she looked she put up her hand again to her neck, and touched the jewel she had won that night, and slowly her eyes filled with tears.

Sir Theodore stirred slightly, then was motionless again, but opened his eyes, and kept them open, looking straight down at his hands and limbs. He remained thus for perhaps a minute. And, during that minute, why she did not know, he reminded Dolores of a child. Then he raised his eyes,

nd saw her standing near him, and gazed at her for an
nstant in silence.

'Doloretta!'

He moved brusquely, drew in his legs, lifted his hands and
tood up.

'Doloretta! Why—what time is it?'

The childish look left him abruptly and completely.

'I must have been asleep.'

'Yes, you were.'

He looked at a clock on the high mantelpiece.

'Getting on for three. No wonder! Have you just com
ack?'

'Yes. What made you sit up?'

'What—I was reading. I got interested.'

'So interested that you slept!'

'Without knowing I was even getting sleepy. Where's—
Vhere 's——?'

He bent down.

'Here 's the book, by Jove!'

He picked up a volume of Carlyle from the floor and put
down on the top of the bookcase beside his chair. The
ction, perhaps, brought him to a full consciousness of
ircumstances and of himself in them. For as he straightened
imself he said, with a more natural ring in his deep bass
oice:

'To be sure there was a reason though! The tournament
t the Giamarchos in which you were to play. How did you
t on?'

For answer Dolores came up to him, put her hand to one
f the electric lamps, and turned its bulb upwards, so that
he light, no longer concealed by the red shade, fell over
er bosom and neck, and the green jewel in its setting of
ade.

'I won this!'

Her husband bent, lifted the jewel from its resting-place,
eld it and examined it with the closely critical eyes of one
ho loves beautiful things, and who knows what is beautiful.

'The first prize?' he asked, in a moment.

'The only woman's prize.'

'It was well chosen.'

He let the jewel go to its place.

'It is original and charming.'

'I'm glad you like it.'

'And—you play so well as to beat all the determined players.'

'I had Montebruno for my partner.'

She paused, then added, in a voice that was rather hard:

'But I believe I did play astonishingly well—for me.'

'I congratulate you. It really is a triumph.'

'Isn't it?'

'Some of the women must be hating you to-night, eh!'

He made a sound something like a laugh, and turned it into a laugh.

'I daresay they are.'

She spoke with apparent cool indifference.

'What does it matter who hates one so long as one does what one wishes and tries to do?' she added.

It was her husband's laugh which had sent her those words, the manner she assumed at this moment.

Sir Theodore looked at her sharply, and as if surprised.

'Isn't that rather a selfish philosophy?' he said.

'You think so? I think one must fight for oneself in this world, or one gets very little. And one can't fight well if one is full of sympathy and consideration for one's enemies.'

'Who were your enemies to-night?'

'Princess Manelli and Mr. Verrall.'

She nearly added 'and Montebruno,' but she checked herself. What she had told to Cesare she did not feel inclined to tell to her husband.

'And you really remained up because you wanted to know the result?' she added, with a change of tone, which might have told him something if he had had ears for the subtleties of Dolores just then, have told him that a little real interest from him would turn ashes into glowing embers.

She really knew in her heart that her husband had stayed up for some other reason. But she longed for a word from him that would prove her heart in the wrong.

'Naturally I wanted to hear how things had gone,' he replied. 'You have won a very beautiful thing.'

'Oh—yes. And a thing I shall be able to keep.'

'What do you mean?'

'Good-night, Theo. I really must go to bed. And you ought to.'

'Yes. Oh, by the way, Doloretta——'

'Yes?' she said, turning.

For she had moved as if to go out of the room.

'The season will very soon be over now. Won't it?'

'Yes. There are a few things, the fête at the Grand, the Concorso Ippico, and then I suppose we must think of starting for England.'

'That is just what I wanted to speak to you about.'

'Now!' she said, as if surprised.

And she turned her eyes towards the clock.

'You 're tired? Of course! We 'll discuss it to-morrow.'

'No, I 'm really not a bit tired. Only it seems such an odd time. But what is there to discuss, Theo?'

She sat down close to one of the lamps. The red light from it lay over her small oval face.

'Only our plans for this summer.'

She said nothing, but leaned back in the great chair, and put up her hand to her emerald.

'But it really is too late——'

'No, no. Go on, Theo.'

Sir Theodore went to the high mantelpiece, searched along it for some matches, found them, and lit a cigarette. He glanced down at Doloretta. How peculiar she looked with that light on her face! He felt almost as if she were a stranger not understood by him.

'Well——' he sat down. 'I——' he was determined to get away from that sensation that his wife was a stranger—— 'I want to hear your views about the summer, Doloretta.'

'At three o'clock in the morning!'

He heard her laugh.

'It 's difficult to have any. Tell me yours, Theo. What date do you propose for the move?'

'Move?'

'Our move to England for the summer.'

'That 's what I wanted to talk over.'

'Well, Theo?'

'You see this year things are so changed—for us.'

'Changed! In what way?'

'My dear Doloretta!' he spoke quickly, in a sudden

outburst of irritation, which showed her he was strung up, perhaps partly because he had slept and been awakened. 'How can you ask? By the death of poor Francis, of course.'

'Oh—I see. I beg your pardon, Theo.'

'I'm sorry,' he said, realising that he had been cross without much reason. 'But of course it has made a considerable change, not so much in your life as in mine.'

'I see.'

'I have duties now that I hadn't before, those children to look after.'

'Yes, indeed.'

'Before of course I had no one.'

'Of course not.'

'And so I mustn't only think of myself now.'

'No. I quite see that.'

'Do move that lamp a little, Doloretta.'

'Why?'

'It throws such—such an ugly light over you. That's much better. But I particularly wish to consult your convenience where changes might seem necessary in the more important matters, for instance in regard to our summer plans. I want to be perfectly frank, and I specially want you to be so too. Then it will all be plain sailing.'

'Do you think of altering our usual summer plans, then?'

'Frankly, I do. I would much rather not go to England this year.'

'Not at all?'

'I have just been there, you see.'

'For—how many days was it?'

'Does that matter?'

Again the irritation appeared in his voice and manner.

'No, of course not. But—then do you propose to go to St. Moritz, or Venice, or where?'

Sir Theodore made an abrupt movement in his chair.

'I might as well go to England as to any of those places. My reason for wishing to make an alteration in my—in our plans is because of the Denzil children, but chiefly, most especially, because of little Theo.'

'Oh—I see.'

'Of course you see! My dear Doloretta! It's surely

pretty obvious. There's nothing very extraordinary about it. Francis specifically left his children in my charge. What can I do but be faithful to that charge? And this first year specially I feel——'

He broke off, got up, searched for another cigarette and the matches. While he did this he had his back to his wife. She watched him, sitting almost like a creature petrified.

'It's Theo!' he said, turning. 'My responsibility is greatest towards the boy.'

He remained standing, and thrust his hands into the side pockets of his smoking jacket.

'Let me tell you, let me try to make you understand just how I feel in the matter.'

'Yes, do.'

He looked calmer, more at his ease, more natural.

'A woman of course knows least about girls. But a boy of Theo's age, the susceptible age, the age in which character has to be formed, needs the influence of a man. Of a father, if possible, if there is no father of one who stands in his place, who—who really cares for the boy almost as if he were the boy's own father. I wish to take the place of a father in Theo's life—so far as I can.'

He stopped, flicked the ash from his cigarette, and, speaking rapidly, developed to Dolores, who sat motionless, his ideas regarding the aims a good father should have, would naturally have, for his little son's advancement, not in the material, but in the moral sense. As he spoke he warmed up. Perhaps the night hour quickened his brain, excited his heart. He spoke almost eloquently. He showed unusual feeling about little Theo.

Without being aware of it he showed to Dolores strange glimpses of certain depths in his heart.

'This is Theo, the father!' she said to herself again and again while he was speaking. 'Or no! this is the shadow of what Theo would have been if I had given him children. But only the shadow—only the shadow!'

At last he paused.

'But I'm letting myself be run away with,' he said, with a short, almost shame-faced laugh. 'I only wanted to make you see why I feel that this summer I ought to stick to the boy. Next year he may have to go to school. He will be

ten. It 's early of course, but—there 's time enough for that. I should in any case want to go to England then to look into the matter of the best preparatory school for him. But this summer I should wish—I consider it indeed almost as my duty—to remain out here.'

'I see. I quite see.'

'I knew you would.'

He spoke with almost warm heartiness.

'Then you wish to remain here in Rome all the summer?'

'Oh no. That would be insufferable. I should propose to do as lots of the Romans do.'

'What 's that?'

'Go to Frascati for the *Villeggiatura*.'

'Oh—yes.'

'The air is delicious there, quite different from the air in Rome. And in the summer the scenery is beautiful. There are such masses of trees.'

'Did you mean to go to the hotel?'

'Well, I have been thinking about a villa.'

So, for once, gossip had justified itself, gossip in the mouth of the little Boccara! At that moment Dolores felt towards the Countess Boccara almost as Edna Denzil had felt towards her, Dolores, in that matter of ignorance and knowledge when the verdict was given on Fraifers.

'There are very few villas at Frascati—aren't there?' she said.

'Not many good ones. In any case there are always the hotels, the Grand and the Tusculum.'

The warm heartiness had died away from his manner.

'What do you think of the idea?' he added, throwing his cigarette away into the empty fireplace.

As he spoke the clock chimed. Dolores moved, leaned forward, then got up.

'It 's not a bad one,' she said. 'As you say, lots of Romans spend the summer at Frascati. But—let 's talk it over to-morrow, shall we? It 's so awfully late now. And I am beginning to feel a little bit tired at last.'

'Of course you are, dear, after all your exertions at bridge. We 'll leave it till to-morrow. But I wanted you to understand the position and just how I feel.'

'I perfectly understand—perfectly. Well, good-night, Theo.'

'I'm coming too. Go on, and I'll turn off the lights and join you.'

Outside her bedroom door he kissed her, and hesitated. But she went into the room rather quickly with a 'Good-night! Sleep well!'

A cloud came over his face.

'She doesn't want me,' he thought.

And he went away to his own bedroom.

That night Dolores had a thought, recurrent, persistent, vital as a live thing that has teeth, that gnaws. It was this:

'If I could give Theo a son! If I could give him a son!'

CHAPTER XXIV

FASHION makes 'seasons,' and very often makes them at the wrong time. The time decreed by fashion as most suitable for a stay on the Lake of Como is a couple of months in the spring and a couple of months in the autumn. In the winter nobody wants to live on the shore of a lake hemmed in by mountains. And in the green and the lustrous summer, when the oleanders and the roses peep over the balconies to see themselves in the cool green waters, people go to Switzerland, or to take 'cures.' And so in the summer, the ideal time of the year at Lake Como, the hotels are deserted, and the big villas are most of them shut up. Green venetians oppose the sun rays. But nobody is hiding behind them. The glorious gardens, with their willows leaning over mouldering staircases and balconies of mossy stone, with their red arbutus trees, their shining magnolias, their regiments of enormous cypresses, their ilexes, their acacias, do not echo with voices, with the ripple of laughter. Only, perhaps, a bare-armed gardener moves slowly among the flowers, and gives water to the smooth green lawns, or some footman or groom, in his shirt sleeves and with sleepy eyes, leans down to the lake with his line, fishing for *agoni*. The

calm of a siesta is over this world of green mountains, green waters, green forests of chestnut trees. The fountains play. But few there are to hear them. The bells chime, but for fishermen not for lovers. The moon lifts her horn above the eastern hills, and hangs in a sky of trembling clearness her silver lamp. And the white fire falls upon the shadows under little Torno, or perhaps upon the bowers of Cadenabbia and the legendary groves of the Villa Carlotta. But few boats steal out to greet her from the boat-houses that hide under the green and the perfumed fleeces flung over them by the gardens.

It is not the 'time' to go to Como.

In the early days of July, despite the decrees of fashion, Dolores arrived at the station of Como with her maid, got into a *fiacre*, and told the man to drive her to the Hotel Villa D'Este at Cernobbio. The maid and the luggage followed in a motor omnibus. The heat was intense in the town, and on the deserted piazza by the lake-side the sunshine was almost blinding in its intensity. But when Dolores stood on the balcony of her sitting-room, looking down on the long garden with its elaborate flower-beds, its palms, its huge plane trees, and its roses falling in showers over the low railing which was the only barrier between the garden and the water, she thought she had chosen well.

Surely she would feel the great peace of the 'empty time' at Como descending upon her spirit. And it would increase as the days went by. Soon every one she knew would have fled from Italy. Switzerland would be crowded. But here the peace would be only intensified.

And Theo would soon be coming. Till he came she would be quite alone—with a thought, that thought which was like a live thing with gnawing teeth.

After that night when she had won the bridge tournament she had been quite definitely conscious of possibilities within her which, till then, she had never envisaged. Perhaps almost every woman possessed them. She did not know. They were possibilities connected with love and its needs. They had been—as she often thought—touched upon in the discussion she had heard between Donna Flavia and Don Marco Turani at Mrs. Eldridge's. Was every woman a potential *donna delinquente*? Dolores sometimes wondered.

But usually she was concentrated upon herself, and shut out the other women and their possible sins.

On the day after her talk with her husband in the dead of night little Theo had come over from Frascati for the fencing at Signor Erdanli's, and had slept at Palazzo Barberini. For the first time a child had stayed with them in the apartment. For the first time Dolores had seen her husband in his own home looking after a child whom he loved. And she had known at once that it would be impossible for her to spend the whole summer at Frascati. There are a few things a woman who deeply loves cannot do. Dolores knew then that the close contemplation of Theo in the bosom of the Denzil family would be a trial she was not fitted to endure for long. Nevertheless she had made a sort of compromise with herself and with fate. She had told her husband that she would remain in Italy for the summer, and would see how Frascati suited her, but that he must let her go to the lakes for part of the time. He had assented eagerly, and had said that he would visit the lakes too. Then he had suggested that they should settle in a villa at Frascati. Dolores had opposed this. Secretly she had shrunk from the definiteness of settling down in a house of their own. And they had taken rooms at the Grand Hotel, and had gone there together at the end of May. But the hotel had been full of people. Theo had got tired of it directly, and Dolores had been obliged to consent to his renting for three months and a half a sort of pavilion with a tiny garden adjoining the Denzils' home. She had just come from that pavilion now after a fortnight spent in it. Theodore had promised to follow her in a couple of weeks. He was acting as tutor to little Theo, and took his duties seriously. It had been decided definitely that the boy should go to school in England the following year. Sir Theodore had developed tremendous ambitions for his godson, and was 'grounding' him in various branches of knowledge. Sometimes it seemed to Dolores as if all the ambition which her husband had trampled on in a moment of disappointment and anger was reviving, but was centring itself upon the career of this child. And she had been almost amazed to find how much of the boy still lingered in Theodore, despite his tale of years, his knowledge of the world, his diplomatic training. The

ineradicable boy had risen within him to set little Theo at his ease.

Dolores had seen her husband romping in the garden before the pavilion with the children, while Edna Denzil looked on.

Her maid arrived with the luggage. She changed her gown and went to sit in the garden under the mighty plane trees.

How blessed was the change from Frascati. At this moment she did not even want her husband. She was thankful to be quite alone. She had left Theo in the very midst of the Latin deponent verbs with little Theo. It was an 'awkward moment' for him to come away. And now she was glad he had not come. For she was conscious of reaction. What secret misery she had endured at Frascati!

In Rome she had had distraction, and she had not—seen.

At Frascati she had seen Theodore playing the father in a family of which she was not the mother.

That was too much for Fate to demand of any woman with a nature such as hers, with a love such as hers.

She had fled from Frascati, with the excuse that her health imperatively needed a complete change from the neighbourhood of Rome. And she was supposed to be going back with Theodore in quite a short time. But she did not mean to go back. She did not mean ever to set foot in that pavilion-like house with the little garden again. The undercurrents of the familiar life there, she felt sure, would sweep her to some sad act if she returned. Rome—yes! Frascati never again! She would find some natural excuse.

A tall and stalwart lad passed by the seat where she was resting, walking with the bold and supple gait of one who lives in the open air, and is perpetually exercising his body. He wore white ducks, and a white jersey, which exposed his copper-coloured arms. Dolores called to him.

'Are you a boatman?'

'Sissignora!' he said, saluting her.

'Take me out in a boat, will you?'

From that moment Dolores began almost to live on the water. She was seeking—strange irony, vehemently seeking!—calm of spirit. Perhaps she would find it there. She glided over the sheltered green waters, lustrous, silken almost, in the golden heat of the mornings, in the trembling magic of

evening hours, sometimes in the romantic stillness of night. Often she talked with Silvio, the boatman, more often she was silent under the orange-coloured awning among the white cushions. Now and then she took the light oars and rowed, while Silvio, sitting stolidly upright in the place of honour, with the tiller ropes in his big, hard hands, steered the boat to the places she loved best; to the dark green shadows under the wall of Villa Volpi, to the Madonna of Villa Pedragho who seemed to smile among her roses, to Villa Pliniana with its waterfall, its giant cypresses, its pathos, almost its stern bitterness of old and broken romance. But always a thought gnawed at her mind. The great silence, the great beauty of this tare ing nature, which lay about her, which cradled her body, could not still its activity, its dogged persistence. Often she felt the terror of being the powerless prey of a thing that knows no relenting, that is incapable of fatigue.

But Theo was soon coming. Soon she would have him to herself in this place, this beauty. Little Theo would not be there to take all his attention from her. Edna would not be there to look on at the man and the children, with gratitude, with approval.

How intolerable the real relations between Edna and herself had been, though the outward relations had been cordial, friendly, even intimate! At Frascati Dolores had become quite certain that Edna had grown into secret dislike of her. And she had shown, she had been irresistibly forced to show, to Edna, her unreal side, the woman of the world who had been developed by concealed unhappiness.

And then the mother must surely have divined a dreadful fact, that Dolores could not like her children, could not be really natural, womanly, with them, especially with little Theo. Whether Edna knew why, Dolores had not been able to determine. But if Edna did know why she had surely been hard, she had not cared. Her own great sorrow had, perhaps, made her indifferent to the sorrows of others for a time. But Dolores, impelled by her secret jealousy, had come to doubt Edna's abiding grief for the vanished husband. The great deeps faithful natures conceal. And Edna concealed hers from every one but Sir Theodore.

There were very few people in the great hotel, and there

was no one whom Dolores knew. She dined and lunched in her sitting-room, and made no acquaintances. After the stress of the Roman season, the anxiety and terror connected with Francis Denzil's illness and death, and the recent episode at Frascati, she had needed complete emancipation from people more than she had known, and she felt that it was doing her body good. But perhaps such complete solitude was not a healthy thing for her mind. As the few travellers on the shores of the lake began to disappear, afraid of the growing heat, as the calm of summer deepened about her, she did not find that calm spread through her spirit. For in spirit she was too often at Frascati.

But she tried to fix her mind on the near future when Theodore would join her. They would be almost alone together in the hotel. She went in to Milan one day and bought some embroideries, one or two bronzes, a beautiful pair of flower vases of Venetian glass. She set about making the sitting-room 'homey.' She got a piano from Como, and even telegraphed to Rome for some of her husband's favourite books. When they arrived, she put them about, drew up a small table, pushed the most comfortable armchair into an angle near it. That was the sort of corner Theo liked when night came and he sat down to smoke a last cigar, and read a 'bed-book.' She stood trying in imagination to see his long limbs stretched out, his head resting against the back of the chair, his bright, rather critical eyes and his brown, long-fingered hands. She even thought of their honeymoon, more than ten years ago. 'Perhaps—perhaps——?'

The quiet days passed, and a sort of fever of anticipation, of anxious desire woke in her. Everybody in the hotel knew that the 'Signore' was expected. The servants had noted her preparations, and, with the active sympathy Italians of their class feel and show with the hopes and fears of a pretty and kindly spoken woman, were quite anxiously alert for his arrival. Silvio was specially on the *qui vive*. He considered himself, in a perfectly respectful way, the particular friend and adherent of the signora, and had already been devising with her water excursions that would delight the signore's heart. Dolores had arranged to hire a *vaporino* belonging to the hotel while her husband was at Villa D'Este, and Silvio was to be allowed to take charge of it. The day

before that on which Sir Theodore was expected he had gone into Como and bought a quantity of little flags. Now the *vaporino* was gaily decorated.

'I 'll go into Como to meet the signore, Silvio,' Dolores said. 'I 'll take a *fiacre* from the piazza to the station and back, and we 'll bring him home by water.'

'*Come ama il suo signore!*' said Silvio to his comrades. He wished he had bought more flags.

Sir Theodore was due to arrive from Milan a little before midday. And Dolores had made a plan for his first evening with her. After lunch Theo was to rest till tea-time. Then, flying all its flags, the *vaporino* would appear to take them to Cadenabbia. There was a moon. They would dine on the boat coming back. Already she had ordered a delicious cold dinner. She was going to make the salad herself in a way that Theo was particularly fond of.

The day dawned, radiantly clear, still, promising almost ineffable glories. Looking from her balcony Dolores saw the far side of the lake steeped in cool green shadows, the chestnut woods on the higher spurs of the hills touched with the pure and youthful light of the childlike hour, which was lovely as if it had but just fallen out of the lap of the Gods. Two boats, one coming from Torno, one from Como, crept over the waveless water, which looked mystic, and as if its tranquillity emanated from a soul that was beautiful and at peace. Under the roses of Villa Pedraglio a great barge was being rowed slowly on its long way to Lecco. Silvio, in rough blue clothes, his arms as usual bared to the sun rays, sat sideways on a low wall to the left just beyond the flower-garden, smoking a cigarette and holding a fishing line. The gardener was carefully tying the stalk of a climbing rose to the rail that ran along the edge of the lake. There was a soft freshness in the air that was like a benediction, there was a quiet over the world that was like an answer to prayer.

For the first time since she had been at Villa D'Este Dolores felt within herself something that seemed closely to correspond with that which lay around her, something that was not yet, but that perhaps could some day be, in complete accord with the peace of Nature.

'I could be—' she thought. 'I could be—if only——'

And for a moment a great sadness overcame her, and she

felt as if she had sweetness, tenderness, goodness within her, and as if they were, perhaps, becoming atrophied because of the numbing influence of the circumstances of her life. Might they not shrivel up, die out of her altogether, unless her life became different? Dimly she felt that it should not be so, that the human being should never be controlled by circumstances, that the soul should be a thing independent, a flame that retains unimpaired its quality whatever its surroundings. What is within ourselves makes us great or small. Ah yes! But is not that which is within ourselves formed and transformed by penetrating influences from without? Dolores knew that she was almost terribly susceptible to influences. Was that her fault? She feared so sometimes, and condemned herself. She never said to herself that it was also her charm.

If only Theo would be happy here, as Torno was happy now in the embrace of the pure and growing light! Surely he would, he must be happy, and so make her happy.

Her eyes filled with tears. She leaned forward over the stone of the balcony towards the beauty of nature. Silvio saw her as he sat holding his line. He looked at her for a moment. She remained motionless. Then suddenly she started, and turned her head looking towards the room behind her. He saw her make a gesture with her right hand. A waiter appeared holding towards her a salver. She took something from it, and the waiter stepped back and vanished.

Silvio felt a faint tug at his line. He had got a fish. When he glanced up again at the balcony he saw his 'padrona,' as he had taken to calling Dolores, violently tearing something with both her hands. Fragments of paper fluttered down. She turned, and went into the sitting-room. He thought there was something very odd in her movement. He threw his fish into a pail of water which stood by him on the shingly path, got up, and went to the place in the garden where the fragments of paper had settled. He picked one of them up, and knew it for a piece of a telegram. As he returned slowly to his fishing he wondered if there was anything wrong. His mind went naturally to the great event of that day, the arrival of '*Il Signore*.' Was the telegram from him? He lit another cigarette,

took up his line, and dropped it again over the wall into the water.

The *vaporino* was ordered to be at the steps at eleven to fetch the signore. In good time Silvio changed into his smart white costume. He saw to the many little flags. They were firmly fastened and would fly bravely. He arranged the white cushions in the cabin. Then he turned on the motor, took the wheel, and brought the boat cleverly out of the boat-house and round to the steps. He had not waited there more than a couple of minutes before Dolores, in a white dress and hat, with a white veil and parasol, and carrying a book, came out, saluted him with her usual kindly '*Buon giorno*, Silvio,' and, putting one hand on his doubled arm, stepped down into the boat.

'Will you go into the cabin, signora?' he asked her.

'No. I'll sit outside. It is going to be very hot.'

'*Davvero!*' he answered.

He was about to climb up on the edge of wood that ran round the cabin, in order to gain the after-part of the little craft, and set the motor going again, when Dolores said to him:

'I'm not going to Como.'

'*Ma—il signore!*' he exclaimed in surprise.

'He isn't coming.'

Silvio stared with his big, bold eyes.

'He isn't able to come to-day. I've had a telegram. So I want to go right up the lake to Cadenabbia. That will be delightful in such weather. Take me up along the left hand shore, and I'll come back by the other.'

'Sì signora.'

Silvio climbed up, and put his hand on the cabin roof. In a moment the throb of the motor made the boat quiver as if with life, and Villa D'Este was disappearing in the golden distance.

CHAPTER XXV

THE telegram which Dolores had received, and which had evidently been delayed in transmission, was from her husband, and was as follows:

'Theo suddenly taken ill, fear blood-poisoning, cannot leave till better news, very sorry, writing.—THEODORE.'

It had been handed in at the office at Frascati.

Directly Dolores had seen the waiter at the sitting-room window with something on a salver she had known it was a telegram from Theo to say he was not coming. Her preparations were useless. Her anticipations had been humiliating and ridiculous. When she had torn up the telegram she had gone in from the balcony and looked at the sitting-room. Flowers, coverings, bronzes, books, those vases—all for Theo! And the corner where he was to sit the last thing at night, smoking and reading, feeling thoroughly at home! Brusquely she went over to it, pulled out the armchair, took the books from the little table. Her cheeks and her hands were burning. And her heart was burning, too, burning with indignation, with a sense of outrage.

Even now, as she sat in the *caprarisa*, with the book shut in her lap, watching the shore flit by, the long garden of Villa Volpi, the clustered houses of Moltrazio, of Urio, of Carate, the more solitary verge where the road rises before descending to Argegno, she was unable to be quite reasonable.

'He never wanted to come! He never meant to come!'

She was saying that to herself. And she was believing it. She had been ousted from her place, the only place she cared for, in Theodore's heart, by little Theo, by these children, and—she now for the first time definitely added this—and by their mother. Because she had only given her husband the devoted love of a nature capable of great devotion, and had not given him a child, she was to be put aside—oh, of course, in the most gentle and natural—natural way!—and left to what? To bridge! To skating! To—husks!

She trembled as she sat there in the sun, while the motor throbbed and the boat rushed on. And it was anger that

shook her. She hated little Theo at that moment! She almost wished—

Argegno was passed. The great stretch of the lake, which seems to be guarded by far-off Bellagio, an almost fairylike town under its climbing woods, came into view with the peaked and rocky mountains that suggest another land than radiant and smiling Italy. The boat suddenly swayed over. Dolores looked hastily round, and saw Silvio clambering towards her. He descended with a *con permesso*! sat down in the prow, and took the wheel, turning his eyes towards the long reaches between them and Bellagio.

Dolores felt sure he had come because of a feeling of sympathy with her. And this touched her, and at the same time added to her sensation of anger and distress, and of acute humiliation. To break out of it, if possible, she began to talk to the lad, and she forced herself to talk gaily.

'Perhaps I'll stay at this end of the lake all day,' she said presently. 'And come back by moonlight.'

'But we have not brought the dinner!' said Silvio, gazing at her with a new gentleness.

'The famous dinner!'

How she had talked about it, had enjoyed ordering it!

'Oh, I can dine at Cadenabbia or Bellagio in one of the hotels,' she said. 'It will be great fun. I shall love to come home by moonlight.'

Alone!

They passed the most beautiful villa on the lake, an exquisite garden running almost wild, surrounding two houses and a little campanile set in a solitary place on a point, with terraces rising, dropping, to terrace, with old wall of carved and weather-kissed stone above old wall, with willows pouring their green tresses—almost as if in a libation—over damp and mossy stairways of stone leading down into the lake depths. This villa had for long years been deserted by its owner, and perhaps partly for that reason had acquired a look of romance which was poignant almost as a soft and beautiful cry in a solitary place. As Dolores saw it she thought:

'To have seen that with Theo—loving me!'

And all the hardness of her anger melted into a sort of anguish such as she had never felt before with so much

poignancy, the anguish of yearning uselessly for something the heart knows could satisfy it absolutely.

Silvio, seeing that his padrona was gazing at the deserted villa, offered to turn and run the boat into its tiny harbour.

'It is beautiful!' he exclaimed, in his loud and manly voice, waving his brown arm towards the willows.

'Not now,' she answered, controlling her voice with some difficulty. 'I will get out at Cadenabbia.'

'Sissignora!'

'Perhaps I'll hire a boat there, and go for a row.'

'*Va bene, signora.*'

Dolores felt that she must escape from the lad's silent sympathy, although she was secretly grateful for it. She must be either quite alone, or with some stranger whom she had never before seen, who knew nothing at all of her. And she must not allow herself to think too much of what happiness is in the world. Such thought was dangerous. It might in time act upon the spirit like a slow poison upon the body.

Silvio brought the boat in close to the wooden landing-stage at Cadenabbia.

'Go and have your lunch, Silvio,' Dolores said to him as she got out.

'Sissignora. What time will you want to start back?'

She hesitated, looking across the smooth water bathed in the burning rays of the sun, then up at the rocky turrets of the mountains behind Bellagio and Lecco. And she felt that at this moment of her life it would be well for her to have a long afternoon of solitude.

Cadenabbia looked almost utterly deserted. There was not a boat on the lake. It was the hour when people eat, or enjoy the siesta.

'I don't think I'll go till quite the evening, Silvio. Don't bother about me at all. But be here about six, and then I'll fix the hour for starting.'

He looked at her rather inquiringly. No doubt he felt himself to be almost in charge of her. However he only said:

'*Va bene, signora,*' took off his cap, and caught up his jacket from the boat.

'I will go and eat maccheroni,' he added.

And he went off along the straight road by the houses, swinging his big shoulders.

When he had disappeared Dolores felt a strange loneliness suddenly descend upon her. It connected itself vaguely with the great heat, seemed almost to be part of the heat. Behind her was the Hotel Bellevue, with its big and glittering windows, its rows of balconies. Two idle waiters were staring out at her. An old lady, probably German, with a red, petulant-looking face, and a hat of mustard-coloured straw set awry on her head, which was *coiffée au diable*, spied upon her from one of the balconies, with an air of fixed attention. Dolores turned quickly, and walked down the road that leads to the Villa Carlotta. She was not hungry. She resolved not to lunch, but presently to have tea at a *latteria*.

She met no one on the road, but saw a few tourists, German and English, mostly of the female sex and obviously unmarried, sitting—almost squatting—in arbours by the water, with an air of illness that was brutal. With heavy, lack-lustre eyes they stared at her as she passed. *Celibate* was written all over them. They were abandoned, like derelicts, to the processes of digestion. Before the great gate of the Villa Carlotta she paused. The fountains were playing in a marvel of roses. She watched the shining water for a moment—the living water—and she remembered a sentence once spoken to her by a woman friend no longer young: 'I must have affection from somebody. Affection to me is the water of life.' For years she had not thought of that sentence. Yet all those years her memory had kept it close, like a treasure laid up in lavender.

'*Barca, signora!*'

An old boatman, with a wrinkled face almost the colour of mahogany, was addressing her. She looked at him, and decided at once. He would not sympathise, would not want to talk. He would just be there, rowing like an old machine.

She stepped into his comfortable boat.

About a quarter to four that afternoon Dolores began to feel a longing for tea. She told her old machine, and he suggested taking her to a *latteria* which stands absolutely alone on a knoll above the lake. Near it is a blue grotto, which is shown to visitors almost as solemnly as the grotto at Capri.

As they were drawing near to it, but were still at some distance, Dolores saw a very small black object a good way off in the water. She looked at it for a minute, then looked away. But presently she turned her eyes towards it again. They were nearer to it now, and she saw it was moving. She began to watch it with a faint interest. Was it a dog? But why should a dog be so far out in a lonely part of the lake? Could it be a man, a swimmer? She began to think it must be. Now she followed the progress of the dark object with a certain quickening of interest, even with a dawning feeling of admiration. If, as seemed nearly certain to her now, it was the head of a swimming man, he was a very fine and intrepid swimmer, and must have come a long distance. For there were no houses along this part of the lake. Only far off the closed villa of an Englishman stood at the green foot of the lonely mountain side. And in the distance, beyond, was the little *hôtel*. And no boat accompanied the moving head if it was a head. From whence had it come? And whither was it going?

The old machine had his back to it as he rowed with a slow stroke that never varied, staring slightly sideways with his small beryl-coloured eyes.

'What 's that?' Dolores asked, pointing towards the black thing. 'It must be a man, I suppose, swimming.'

The boatman slowly turned his head, and took a long and steady look.

'Yes. It 's a swimmer,' he said, in a rather hoarse voice.

'Where is he going, do you think?'

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

'Where we are going, maybe.'

But he stared very hard at the moving head, and an almost fierce keenness came into his old eyes. He pulled harder at the oars. Very soon Dolores could see a movement in the lake as the swimmer cleaved his way through it with strong, almost machine-like strokes, then a gleam of white as his shoulders, rising a little out of the water, caught the sun rays, then a regular flail-like motion of his arm as he changed from the breast to the side stroke.

'What a pace he goes!' she murmured.

There was a concentrated strength and energy in the man's swimming which made her heart leap for a moment,

and took her out of that sadness which still seemed connected with heat, with shining, and with the emptiness of the hour of siesta. The glory of human force took hold of her woman's mind, as it can never take hold of the mind of a man, giving a peculiar, almost tingling, thrill to it. In that recurring flail-like movement of the arm she seemed to see a symbol of masculine strength, will, determination, and dogged vigour.

'It must be the Principe Carelli,' observed the old boatman.

'Principe Carelli!' said Dolores.

'Don Cesare,' said the boatman. 'He comes here sometimes in the summer, and very few swim like he does.'

He pulled hard, evidently with the intention of joining the swimmer, looked round again, and said:

'Si, si! It is Don Cesare!'

'Go to the *latteria* now, please. I want my tea,' said Dolores.

A small spot of red showed on each of her cheeks. She sat back under the awning and did not look any more towards the swimmer. The old boatman lay on his oars for a moment, and the beryl-coloured eyes observed Dolores with a curiosity that showed plainly a long knowledge of certain ways of the world.

Then he pulled towards the *latteria*.

'Don Cesare will be landing there, maybe,' he observed, in his hoarse voice.

Dolores nearly told him to turn and go back to Cadenabbia. But that look in his eyes deterred her. When she landed at the foot of the knoll, behind which rose the mountain-side, the dark head of the swimmer was slowly travelling towards the shore, and as she walked up the path to the little house she met a man carrying a towel, a panama hat, and a small leather suit-case. On seeing her he smiled, and turning his head, shouted:

'Maria! a lady's coming!'

An ample woman, rustic and kind in appearance, and browned by the sun, came out of the house in response to the shout, and, with smiles and salutations, conducted Dolores to a seat under the trees, received her order, and

walked cheerfully away to carry it out. Before she entered the house she shaded her eyes with a small brown hand, on which shone a heavy gold ring, and gazed down to the lake.

Dolores laid her parasol and her book on the wooden tea-table and sat still. Below her, on the farther side of the knoll, she saw a smart boat lying. In it was sleeping a boatman clad in scarlet and white. The Italian flag flew at the stern. Warmth, silence wrapped the whole place, all the scene that lay before her eyes. The sleeping boatman, whose attitude and whose thrown back head suggested a sort of ecstasy of repose, gave to the picture a strong 'note' of stillness, a value which increased the effect made by Nature. Hushed activities were there. The sun and the hour had sealed the fountains. Only that swimmer symbolised by his determined stroke the tense energies of life. Dolores could not see him now, but she felt him cleaving his way towards her through the element that can destroy, but that supported, made possible, his bold and serene activity.

And though she sat motionless in the midst of the peace, the exquisite solitude, she knew not peace, nor could she feel any charm, or sagness, of solitude.

Presently, it seemed to her soon, she heard a distant sound of voices, and she knew that the swimmer had gained the land. The brown-faced woman came out of the house bearing a tray, and set before her a large china teapot, sugar, cream, milk in a separate jug, a big cup and saucer, bread and butter, and a huge currant cake.

Dolores thanked her in an absent-minded way. She still heard those voices.

'Don Cesare is coming,' said the woman, standing beside her. 'He has swum all the way from the Villa Serena.'

'Where is that?'

'At Bellagio. He is a swimmer!'

'Thank you.'

The woman smiled.

'Very few swim as he does.'

She returned to the house.

Dolores began her tea, always listening to the voices. Soon they grew louder, drew nearer. She heard steps crunching on the stones behind her. But she did not look

round. The noise of the steps ceased, and she heard a voice that she knew say in Italian:

'Si, si. Out here under the trees!'

Then for a moment there was a complete silence. She knew that Cesare Carelli was standing before the house and looking towards her. But still she did not turn round. At last he said:

'Lady Cannynge!'

Then she looked and saw him, saw him standing in a white linen suit, with a panama hat, the brim turned down over his eyes, a lighted cigarette in his hand. His dark face was extraordinarily fresh and energetic. His figure seemed to exhale force—youth, but not the youth of the boy, the stronger, even more vital youth of the man who is young. 'Noon not dawn!' was her quick thought.

Cesare came up to her. He was evidently somewhat surprised to find her there, but—Dolores saw it at once—he was not astonished. He took her hand, and held it in his, and she felt all the freshness of the lake in his hand.

'How delightful, and how extraordinary, to come upon you here and all alone!'

'Then you were the swimmer!'

'And you the lovely lady in the boat!'

'Did you notice me? I watched you for a long time. I thought at first you were a dog.'

She laughed.

'May I have tea at your table?' he asked.

'Of course.'

He caught up a chair, put it opposite to her, and sat down.

'But you see nothing there!' she said.

'I like seeing nothing,' he answered. 'And how did you come from Villa D'Este? By the steamer from Cernobbio?'

Dolores put down the big cup which she was just lifting to her lips.

'You knew I was at Villa D'Este?'

'Of course. It is better for you to be there than at Frascati.'

He said the last words with a sudden, and almost intense seriousness, like a man who had, or believed himself to have, a right to judge of what was good and evil for her.

'Oh, I think Frascati is delicious in summer,' said Dolores, quickly and decidedly.

'But you are at Villa D'Este!'

At this moment the woman came out with Cesare's tea. He spoke to her familiarly, calling her Maria, and inquiring for members of her family. She made a voluble and delighted reply. When she had gone he said:

'From a child I've been on the lake. My uncle, Prince Camara, has the Villa Sirena at Bellagio.'

He looked at her and then, with a slight smile, repeated:

'You are at Villa D'Este.'

'Only for a few days. I'm expecting my husband.'

'He hasn't come then?'

'He was to have arrived this morning.'

'I know.'

'But how?' she exclaimed, almost with a touch of anger.

'It's very simple. I was at Frascati three days ago. I had been with my mother in Lombardy —' He suddenly drew his dense black eyebrows down and looked almost brutal for a moment. 'One must, you know, sometimes! I thought you were still at Frascati, that you had even rented a villa for the summer. And I went over to see. It was a glorious day. As I was coming into the Piazza Romana I encountered a picnic party going to Tusculum, children on donkeys, two ladies in a pony carriage, and your husband.'

'The Denzils of course!' said Dolores, trying to speak carelessly. 'So that was how you knew?'

'Yes. I went with them to Tusculum.'

'You!'

A sudden hardness, almost a bitterness, transformed her face. Cesare saw before him a new Dolores. And Dolores herself, a moment later, sat wrapped in hidden wonder at her own possibilities, even at her own present reality. How she must have counted upon this man's secret loyalty to her to have felt that he was a traitor because he went to Tusculum! It was as if she had broken a commandment, and was no longer the woman she had been.

'They asked me to. The smallest girl asked me, insisted on my coming.'

'Oh—Viola!' She forced a smile, and then was able really to smile. 'She is devoted to men.'

'Evidently. And men will certainly be devoted to her.'

'So my husband told you he was coming here?'

'Yes. That was why I was swimming just now.'

Dolores looked at him, and her eyes were a question.

'I thought he was here—at Villa D'Este with you, I mean.'

'Why are you not having your tea?'

'I wanted—I hoped perhaps you would pour it out for me.'

She drew his teapot slowly towards her.

'I must get something hot into me,' he added, with his most English manner. 'It's a fairly long swim from Bellagio. But it has done me good.'

She poured out the tea and gave him the big cup. He felt that she had forgiven him for having gone to Bellagio. How good that she had made of it a matter for forgiveness!

'Worlds of good!' he added, as he put the cup to his lips.

And he smiled at her as he drank. Between the cup and the drawn down brim of his hat she saw his black eyes gleaming with light. At that moment their fires seemed strangely concentrated, as sun rays are by a burning glass.

'There is nothing like exercise when you want to ride your mind on the curb,' he said, putting the cup down, and slightly stretching his legs in a way that made her feel the happy lassitude of his body after the fine effort it had made.

'This is better than Rome, better than Tusculum, and how much better than my father's place near Monza with little Donna Ursula,' he exclaimed with an almost boyish sound in his voice.

'Is Donna Ursula there?'

'Oh yes. You know mamma wants me to marry her.'

'You—Donna Ursula!'

The little doll, cold, observant, bright-eyed, narrow, rose up before Dolores.

Cesare leaned a little forward over the table.

'You don't think we should suit?'

'I don't know that I can tell.'

'Mamma says we are made for each other, to supply each other's deficiencies.'

'Perhaps she is right.'

'She is, if ice can supply the deficiency of fire,' he said,

in a tone that vibrated with contempt, and almost with indignation. 'Do you think it can?'

His eyes were asking her many more questions than his lips.

'No,' Dolores said.

Cesare looked suddenly happier.

'You understand things that poor dear mamma has no conception of. You understand why I took that long swim.'

'How do you know that?'

'Don't you?'

'Perhaps. I am not quite sure. No, you needn't explain. It doesn't matter whether I do or not.'

'To me it does.'

'I'm thinking of myself.'

'Were you? Do you often think of yourself?'

'Very often.'

She paused, then added, with a sort of sad seriousness, almost like a child who has just realised something distressful:

'I'm afraid I am an egoist.'

'No, I don't think so.'

'You can't know.'

'You do not look like an egoist.'

'Do move your chair so that you can see the view,' she said. 'I quite hate to see you with your back to it all.'

He got up at once and put his chair sideways, at one of the ends of the little table.

'Don't you care for beauty, for Nature?' she added, almost critically.

'Yes, very much, in my way,' he said.

'What way is that?'

'I like mountains because one can climb them, water because one can swim in it. I love the open, for a gallop on a good hunter, like my Irish mare, Medusa; the marshes for the duck shooting.'

'And sunsets and moonlight nights?' she asked, almost obstinately, and with the air of one who is getting an adversary in argument into a corner.

'A moonlight night—yes, I could care for that, I could!' He pushed his hat a little upwards and backwards. 'To-

night there will be a moon,' he said. 'By the way, you have never told me how you came from Villa D'Este.'

'I came in a *vaporino*.'

'All alone?'

'Yes—of course. At least I had Silvio.'

'Who 's Silvio?'

'A very nice boatman.'

'Si?'

He drank some more tea with frank relish, put down the cup, and said:

'We had regular romping at Tusculum. Your husband was almost like a boy. I didn't know him before.'

'Why don't you eat anything?'

'I never eat in the afternoon. That 's a fine little boy of Mrs. Dergil's.'

'Yes. He 's ill now, poor little chap.'

'Ill?'

'Very ill, I 'm afraid. That 's—that 's why my husband couldn't come. He telegraphed at the last moment. You see he is the child's guardian, and stands to him almost in the place of a—I mean he feels a certain responsibility.'

'Does he?'

'Of course he does. They 're afraid it is blood-poisoning.'

'That sounds bad.'

'I shall have a letter to-morrow explaining.'

'And if it is bad news will you have to go back to Frascati?'

'I! Of course not. What good could I be?'

'I wonder what the news will be,' said Cesare, after a pause. 'Will you do something for me, Lady Cannynge?'

'What is it?'

'Will you let me know the news when you get it? He 's such a fine little boy. I should like to hear how he gets on.'

'I 'll send you a card then.'

'To the Villa Sirena, Bellagio. Thank you.'

She looked at him with a searching directness. She had eyes that were incapable of looking actually piercing. Almost always there seemed to be in their cloudy depths a softness. He thought of her nickname, 'Gazelle.'

'And anyhow you will stay on at Villa D'Este for a time?'

'I suppose so. I think so.'

She had lowered her eyes now and spoke with some faint hesitation.

'And quite alone, if Sir Theodore can't get away?'

'I—I like solitude. It rests one.'

She knew by his expression—she was again looking at him—that he had seen through her barricade of a lie, had seen at least something of the truth crouching behind it.

'I don't, for too long. And I'm alone at the villa. My uncle is at Salsomaggiore.'

'Why do you stay there then?'

'I thought I would come. I think I will stay a little while.'

His eyes now told Dolores plainly the truth, which already she knew though it had never been spoken, though, till to-day, she had never wished it to be spoken. Till to-day! Since Cesare had come up to her from the water, since she had felt the freshness of the lake in his hand, since he had told her of that meeting which had ended in his joining the party to Tusculum, a reckless feeling had grown within her, had stolen through her, penetrating—it seemed—through every vein in her body. She had noted it, with a startled thrill, when her mind for a moment had glimpsed this man's defection. And at that moment, too, she had fully, nakedly realised that she looked upon the Denzils now wholly as her enemies, enemies of her happiness, her peace, enemies, perhaps, even of her safety. And in the reaction from that momentary fear of defection she almost—still was it not only 'almost?'—wished Cesare to say plainly that he was on her side, that there was a feeling in his heart for her, which ranged him on her side, not for a moment but for ever. Stricken by the feeling of being unnecessary something within her wailed to be needed, then, at that very moment. Again and again, as she sat by the tea-table, she had seen the family party, the children on their donkeys, Mrs. Massingham and Edna, Theodore, Cesare, mounting up into that eyrie of the sun above the vast Campagna and the shining of the sea. She had seen Theodore romping 'almost like a boy.' Although she still seemed to feel the touch of Cesare's strong hand on hers, in her relation to him at this moment there was nothing of the physical. Her body was not speaking, although she felt as if it independently knew something that

was strange, and that she wished it did not know. She was wholly mental and affectional in her desire to be needed here and now, to have that need stated in words. She was ashamed of her desire, she wished to strangle it, to know it dead. But her shame had no power over it. And Cesare must have seen it in her eyes, in her features, perhaps even in her hands and her whole attitude.

'Dolores!' he said, leaning towards her, laying his arm on the table, with his brown hand feeling for hers. 'Dolores——'

She saw his face change completely into a sudden, broad smile which showed his big white teeth.

'Mario!' he called out, tapping his fingers idly on the table in a way that was nonchalant. 'I have only six soldi with me for both the bills.'

The padrona of the *latteria* was coming out of the house with the conto.

He exchanged some lively chaff with her in Italian. But when she had gone to get some change for a ten-lire note he said to Dolores:

'I am going to dine with you to-night. You must let me. There is no one but no one in the hotel at Cadenabbia. And I will come down the lake with you—not to Villa D'Este. You can put me ashore at Carate or Urio. I'll walk back, or row. I'll get back somehow. Do not say no. I must do it. I will do it.'

And to that last assertion of his will something in her assented, as if it were irresistibly forced to assent.

'Let him tell me!' that was her thought. 'Then it will all be over. I will explain. I will send him away. And it will all be over. But I must hear him tell me that he wants me.'

Was it a reckless, a wicked voice within her? She did not think so then. It seemed to her the natural voice of woman, of every woman who had lived as she had lived, who had been treated as she was being treated, who needed what she needed.

Of any wrong to Cesare she did not think at all. There was a force in him that prevented her, then, from thinking it possible she could wrong him. She felt too weak. And he looked and seemed so strong.

'Will you come in my boat?'

'No, no.'

'May I——?'

'No.'

'Then——' he took off his hat.

Without it he looked different, a little older than before, a little graver. Something in his appearance, thus changed, sent a doubt into the mind of Dolores.

'You'd—I think you'd better not come to Cadenabbia to dine,' she said.

'I am coming,' he answered.

'Perhaps I may not be there. I may go down the lake before dinner.'

He only looked firmly into her eyes, drew his thick brows down, and repeated:

'I am coming.'

Then Dolores left him and went to her boat.

Soon she heard behind her a regular plash of oars. She opened the book in her lap and began to read. And she seemed to be reading steadily till the boat touched land opposite to Villa Carlotta.

At a few minutes before six Silvio saw her coming towards where he stood near the *vaporino*.

'I think——' she began.

She stopped.

'Sissignora?' said Silvio.

She looked at the lake. The water seemed if possible even calmer than before, as if it had sunk into a dreamless sleep as the evening drew on. The sky was absolutely clear.

'I think I'll start,' she said, very slowly.

'Now?'

'Will it be a very lovely night, do you think, Silvio?'

'Sissignora. Look at the sky!'

He waved his arm.

'How beautiful it is!' he exclaimed in his loud voice, pronouncing the Italian words with the accent of the North.

'You think?'

'You should stay, signora, and return with the moon.'

'You think so? Then—I will.'

'At what time, signora?'

'Half-past eight or nine. No, half-past eight punctually.'

'*Va bene, signora.*'

Silvio looked after her steadily as she went away. His quick intelligence had grasped the difference in her, a difference arisen since the morning hours.

'*La signora è un po' strana!*' was his mental comment.

At seven Cesare arrived in the smart boat from Bellagio. He went at once to the Hotel Bellevue to look at the visitors' list. There were very few names, and none of Italians whom he knew. And there were no English names. He spoke to the head waiter, and arranged to have a table in a quiet corner of the restaurant. Then he went out to find Dolores. He knew that he would find her.

She was sitting in the little garden on the far side of the road close to the water, under a trellis of roses, looking at the rocky mountains, which were subtly changing colour to the influence of the delicate evening light. She turned her head as he approached, and he thought, 'Yes, she is like a gazelle.' Even he thought that he saw in her eyes the half-frightened, half *espiègle*, and wholly gentle look characteristic of the eyes of the gazelle.

'Is it dinner-time already?' she said.

Cesare had meant to sit down beside her. But she got up at once, evidently to accompany him to the hotel.

'If you wish it to be,' he said.

She heard a plash of oars.

'But there is your boat!' she said.

'Yes.'

'Going away?'

'I do not care to keep the man here for so many hours. He has a family and likes to eat with them at home.'

'Let us dine quickly!' she said. 'I must not get home too late.'

Silvio was by the waterside with two boatmen of Cadenabbia. He looked after Dolores and Cesare with deep interest as they entered the hotel. Then he talked eagerly with the boatmen.

In the restaurant there was only one person dining, the red-faced lady, probably German, who had stared at Dolores from the balcony. In a white blouse she looked fatter and redder than before. Upon her bedevilled hair she still wore the mustard-coloured hat. She stared at Dolores and

Cesare with a morose, and apparently almost apoplectic attention. To Dolores her small and angrily attentive eyes were as the eyes of 'the world.' She felt uneasy, almost guilty under their gaze. And she felt that she was singularly unfitted, by something in her temperament, for what almost every woman she knew in Rome would think an amusing and delightful little adventure.

Cesare talked to her quietly. He was absolutely self-possessed, as indeed he always was. But she felt, rather than saw, a strong excitement heaving, as it were, beneath his surface calm. And she knew that he could feel, and that his strong, perhaps even violent feeling was for her. And this knowledge gradually comforted her. Her intense susceptibility to all outward influences made her conscious of Cesare's strong shock from this strength in him. But it was a shock that vivified, not stunned. And again the almost reckless feeling woke in her. She made him talk of the picnic at Tusculum, describe every detail of that day in the sun. She pretended to enjoy the thought of their—the Denzils', her husband's, his—enjoyment. She laughed when Cesare narrated the manner and matter of the game played by the three children, Sir Theodore, himself, and even by Mrs. Massingham, half under protest, and almost rent asunder by loud breathings.

'And Edna?' asked Dolores. 'Didn't she play too?'

'No. Mrs. Denzil looked on.'

'I suppose she thought it would be hardly right for her to romp—already.'

Cesare felt the interior bitterness, almost saw it striving for an outlet, in that level murmur. Princess Mancelli had educated him in the fierce truths of feminine jealousy. He continued to talk about Tusculum, using his knowledge, relying on it for the first time. He knew he was being cruel. He did not know—being a man he could not know—how cruel. He had comforted Dolores. Now he tortured her. And under the torture the recklessness in her grew. She no longer cared at all for those eyes of the world staring under a head of bedevilled hair. The German lady—she really was German!—left the room, after a final stewed pear, with a most unfavourable opinion of the 'ridiculously thin woman in the white hat.'

Her departure infected Dolores with the thought of departure.

'I ought to go,' she said.

'Well!' said Cesare. 'But it is very early still.'

'It is a long way to Villa D'Este.'

'Not long enough for us, with a moon.'

'I'm afraid I must go back alone,' she said.

She knew—somehow she knew mysteriously—that she certainly was not going alone. But she wished to avoid what she felt to be wrong; he was of those who think words can be wrong, almost as wrong as bad actions—and she resolved to make a struggle against the approach of evil.

'In fact I really must,' she added.

She moved as if to get up.

'You won't even allow me my cigarette?'

'Oh—well, that is too bad. Yes, and I will have one too.'

He gave her one, but he lit a large cigar.

'You said a cigarette!' she said.

'If I smoke too many they hurt my throat. And I have smoked too many to-day.'

His lie made her think of Denzil. When Denzil went down into the darkness had he not condemned her to the darkness? Abruptly she was seized upon by a melancholy that made her desire, almost with terror, a refuge.

'Please let us sit out of doors,' she said, getting up. So fierce was the melancholy that she had to disturb it by movement.

'Yes, in the little garden by the lake. Have you a wrap?'

'In the boat. But don't fetch it. I don't want it.'

The moon was not up yet. A soft mantle of silvery grey, with a hint of dim blue in it, wrapped the world. In the breast of the large silence voices were almost like points of flame in blackness. The sound of steps on the road was romantic. Retreating forms of people, perhaps ugly, possessed the strange beauty of shadows. In the little garden there was no one.

They sat down under the trellis of roses now colourless in the night.

Cesare took her hand. She tried to draw it away. He held it fast. And she let it remain in his. In his hand she

felt his excitement. It both frightened and fascinated her. It roused in her no evil sensation, but it made her think violently of a possibility that no doubt was evil. Never had she felt more mental than at this moment.

Holding her hand fast in his Cesare began to speak. He did not make love to her. He began to give her his secret, the secret he had never before told to a human being. And he mentioned no woman's name. He did not ask for pity plainly in words, did not make, that is, a blatant appeal such as a boy in such circumstances would almost certainly have made. Yet, subtly, all that he said was really said to establish a claim on the softness, the tenderness, of the intensely feminine woman beside him. He did not ask her never to betray his secret. She felt that he knew it was not [illegible] so. There was complete trust in his hand. That was her feeling. His flesh, bones, nerves told her that, and touched her heart as well as her hand. For a man expects to be trusted, but a woman loves to be trusted. His story was the story of his intrigue with Princess Manelli. An Englishman would not have told it perhaps. An Italian could not have told it with the reticence Cesare still was able to preserve in this moment. His way of telling it, the volubility, the fervour, the command of language, the eloquence—that was Italian. The delicacy in all detail had something of English *pudeur*, born only for her, this woman whom he knew to be pure.

The narrative was a story of slavery, of possession, of youthful vanity and sensuality, flattered and developed, of the waking of manhood with its restlessness born of incipient understanding, which became complete understanding; of the shame and the misery of the bondman, of the self-torment of a traditional sense of honour often at war with the naked truth of things, of the torment, imposed from without, of intense and eternally watchful jealousy. Despite Cesare's instinctive carefulness in many matters of detail Dolores was led by him into a new and terrible world, a world whose tumult, whose warring impulses, whose spiritual and physical tortures—the former realised by her far more keenly and sensitively than by Cesare, and far more clearly than the latter—blotted out for the moment from her eyes and mind the stillness, the peace, the mystic beauty

of the world that lay around her, silently waiting for recognition, but remote from any appeal. The subtle misery of the body was there, a frightful, and, it seemed, an independent thing, a force altogether detached from the soul—following its own courses, driven by its own demons, going to its own perdition. It was surely the woman's body that was jealous, that followed, that spied, that craved, that cursed; it was surely Cesare's body that angrily longed, that fought against sense of honour and traditions, for the liberty that was necessary to it. And all this was quite hideous to Dolores.

And then the narrative came to herself, and a soul seemed to be released and to arise—she thought like a dove out of a pit of black ashes.

Cesare described how it was her coming into his life that made him finally resolve to grasp his liberty. He did not speak with any sentimentality, or pay her compliments, or rave about the effect her beauty had had upon him. But he spoke with deep sentiment, and with a sort of vehement and clear picturesqueness which painted what she had been in those early days to him, what thoughts and desires she had engendered in him, what action she had all unconsciously led him to. He showed her her own softness, her own romance, her needs, her rights, even her longings, by describing his summoned into being by her. How masculine his were! How different in fibre, as it were, from her own! But they were imperious. He presented himself to her as a man who was starving, because he had been fed with the wrong food.

And Dolores felt that Princess Mancelli had possessed no food for his soul.

Finally Cesare told her how he had cast off the yoke from his neck, how he had forced his way out into freedom, not complete freedom, perhaps, but a liberty such as he had not hitherto known, such as he had hardly hoped for.

'You are cruel,' Dolores almost whispered, speaking at last. 'You are cruel.'

She drew her hand away, but gently.

'I believe all men are,' she added. 'As soon as they don't love any more.'

And as she said that she was not thinking only of him.

'I don't know whether I was cruel or not, and I don't much care,' he answered. 'I had to do it, and it was you who made me do it.'

It seemed to Dolores at that moment very wonderful that she had been able to inspire such a fierceness of action, that she had, unwittingly, crushed a woman down into the dust, that she had poured into a man the strength of desire that had made him ruthless. But she believed Cesare, and she was almost frightened.

'It was your softness, your gentleness, your—the look in your eyes. It was you.'

He sought for her hand again, but she got up.

'I must go,' she said.

'I am coming with you.'

'Why?'

'I am coming as far as Urg.'

She looked at him, and said nothing more. They went towards the boat. Silvio was there with some boatmen. He saluted Dolores.

'You can bring the boat, Silvio. I am ready to go now.'

'Sissignora.'

As a moment later Silvio was helping Dolores into the boat she said to him:

'This signore is coming a little way down the lake for the sake of the trip. I'll tell you where to put him ashore.'

'Sissignora. But it must be where there's a landing.'

'Of course.'

Dolores settled herself outside the cabin with a cushion at her back against the partition. As Cesare was getting into the boat he said something to Silvio in a low voice.

'Where shall I sit?' he asked.

Dolores pointed to the seat on the opposite side of the narrow gangway.

'Or shall I steer?' he suggested, pointing to the wheel.

'If you like.'

He sat down on her side by the wheel. Silvio climbed into the stern, to his fastness behind the cabin, and began to back the *vaporino* out into the lake preparatory to turning her prow homewards.

The moon was just above the crest of the mountains.

The first ray of silver lay on the water stretching towards the boat, as if in an effort to touch it.

'I think you had better not come,' Dolores said, in a quick and very low voice. 'Why should you come?'

Before he could answer the boat turned easily, and set her course for the south. And, perhaps because of that, he did not answer at all. With his hand on the wheel he sat sideways to Dolores, so that she saw his profile, looking dark and almost mysterious, relieved against the delicate dimness, lit with strange silver pallors, of the night. What had she to do with this man, or he with her? They were almost strangers still. Yet he had given her his secret. If he knew hers?

She shivered at the thought.

'You are cold,' he said. 'Put on your wrap.'

He got up, bent, went into the cabin and brought it out. She moved, and he put it round her shoulders. And as he did that she suddenly knew what he had not told her, how he loved her with his body. The momentary light touch of his hands on her shoulders and the upper part of her arms taught her that, more than his hand clasp had taught her. And it threw her into a strange, and almost terrible confusion of mind. She was in a chaotic state of rebellion. She was rebelling against Cesare, against herself—the temple in which dwelt a hateful thought of which she was wholly unable to rid herself—against her husband, against all that had brought her to this present moral and emotional crisis. She felt like a guilty woman, and then like a foolish child because she had felt like that. Her innocence made her absurd, even to herself. How could she have lived so long in her world, have known so much, and yet remain so almost ludicrously Puritanic? A man had made a sort of love to her. She had not responded. And yet already she felt as if she had sinned against the light.

'Aren't we going very slowly?' she asked.

Cesare was again at the wheel, and the *vaporino* was skirting the left-hand, here deserted, bank of the lake.

'I don't think so. This isn't a very high-powered boat.'

He relapsed into silence.

Presently, almost directly, Dolores began genuinely to wonder why he had come. He would be out probably all

night. For there were no steamers plying so late, and Urio was a long way off. He was not talking to her, not even looking at her now. With what seemed to her a business-like air of competence he sat at the wheel guiding their course. Perhaps he was the victim of a reaction after the strong feeling he had just been showing to her. She could not divine his mood. Baffled, her consciousness of his strength increased. She began presently to wonder if she had hurt him. When he put on her wrap had he perhaps felt as if she shrank from him? It would be a good thing if he had. But she—had she instinctively shrunk from him when she had realised what she had realised?

She nearly began to cry. Suddenly she felt like a poor weak little thing, battered about, flung this way and that, desperately alone. It was Cesare's silence, his grim retreat into himself, after his strangely frank and even passionate outburst, which gave her this lonely feeling. It was scarcely bearable. She did not love this man. Her heart was possessed, unworthily perhaps. That she should ever come even to wonder if that were so! But she loved something in Cesare. That day had amply proved it to her. She loved his love of her. She felt as if she needed his love of her, not another man's, his. Then there was something special in Cesare that set him apart from other men in her estimation!

The prow of the boat turned, slipping through the moonlit water, and sending a silver curve, like a ruff, to right and left. It was as if it turned in answer to a thought.

'Where are we going?' said Dolores.

Her own voice startled her. She was still more startled by his silence. But she did not repeat her question. She looked, and she saw rise out of the moonlight the thickly-wooded promontory where stood the deserted villa which had so painfully moved her in the morning by its aspect of poignant romance. The *vaporino* was heading straight towards it. She leaned forward a little, moving with a gentleness that was almost surreptitious, and she saw that her companion, who was looking towards the shore, was frowning. She drew back. The shuttered houses, blind, dark, with the flowing darkness of those weeping trees falling to the water below them, showed dimly on the rocky

point. The woods, so black, so near, seemed groping after them. The steady throb of the motor failed.

'What is the matter?'

Dolores leaned forward again.

'Why are we stopping here?'

Cesare was still frowning. His drawn down brows gave him in the night a hard and brutal expression. He turned, with a deep sigh, but only looked at her for an instant. The frown was gone. He said:

'I must be careful. The harbour is small.'

His voice sounded strange.

The wheel went round. The *vaporino* was gliding into the shadows. Silvio's voice called out from the stern, and Cesare left the wheel. Silvio had charge of it now. He reversed the engine, then sent the boat on again.

'But why are we coming here?'

Cesare seemed to suppress a sigh.

'I know you care for beauty.'

'Beauty!'

She spoke almost with a sharp anxiety.

'Didn't we talk of it to-day at the *latteria*? I thought I would show you the most beautiful villa on the lake by moonlight. That's all.'

Pole in hand Silvio was edging towards them, his other hand on the cabin roof.

'But it is closed!'

'The gardens I mean.'

'But it's deserted, shut up!'

'I have brought the key of the *cancello*.'

He showed it. Silvio took the shore with the hook of his pole, steadying the boat. The moonlight was gone. The little harbour was black with shadows.

'We are allowed to have one—at the villa. We may go in at any time.'

Silvio leaped ashore, and bent down to bring the swaying boat close in, gently.

'Have you got a match?' Dolores asked Cesare.

Her voice was very low, very level, almost unnaturally level.

'You want——?'

'To see the time, please. I've got my watch here. I only want a light.'

He felt in his pocket, found and drew out a box, struck a match, protected it with one hand, bending down. The evening was still. The tiny flame lit up his face, showed the exact expression in his eyes.

Dolores did not look at her watch.

'I 'm not going ashore here,' she said.

'The——'

'I 'm not going ashore. Silvio!'

'Signora.'

'We find it 's too late to go ashore. Take the boat out, please!'

'Sissignora!'

'And stop at the nearest landing-place from which the signore can get a boat home.'

'*Va bene, signora.*'

Till they reached Argegni neither Dolores nor Cesare spoke. When he got up to leave the *vaporino* he said, almost in a whisper:

'For God's sake forgive me! If you knew—if you knew!'

'Good night,' she answered.

And now her voice was broken.

'That card—you 'll send it?'

'I said I would.'

'And if the boy is worse I shall come down to Villa D'Este. You will be there alone.'

'Good night,' she said in a voice that was scarcely audible.

She got up to go into the little cabin. As she did so Cesare gave something to Silvio. He stood by the edge of the water watching till the *vaporino* disappeared in the silver track of the moon.

Two days later he landed at the steps that lead down from the garden of Villa D'Este to the water. He had received a card from Dolores on which were written these words:

'I am sorry to say little Theo Denzil is worse. My husband isn't able to come.—D. C.'

He was about to cross the garden and go into the hotel when he saw Silvio a little way off by the wall fishing for *agoni*. He went towards him. Silvio looked up and took off his cap with a smile.

'Fishing?' said Cesare.

'Si, Eccellenza.'

'Is the padrona in the garden anywhere?'

'The padrona of the hotel, Eccellenza?'

'No, the lady whom you took to Cadenabbia the other day.'

Silvio jerked his head slightly backward, thrusting out his square chin.

'She has gone, the beautiful signora,' he said, almost sadly.

'Gone!' said Cesare. 'Do you mean she has left Villa D'Este?'

'Si, Eccellenza, this morning suddenly. And she had ordered the *vaporino* for this afternoon.'

'Why did she go so suddenly?'

Silvio looked steadily at Cesare. Then in his loud voice, throwing out his arm in an ample gesture, he answered:

'Eccellenza, I don't know. But she was expecting her signore. He did not come. And I think she has gone back to him.'

When Cesare inquired at the bureau of the hotel Silvio's surmise was confirmed. He was informed that Lady Cannynge had suddenly made up her mind to return to Frascati, and had gone away within an hour of her decision, leaving her maid to follow with most of her luggage. Only the day before she had said that she would stay on perhaps for several weeks.

'Do you think she means to come back?' Cesare asked.

The dark and agreeable man in the bureau pursed his lips into an expression of doubt.

'*Chi lo sa, Signor Principe?*' he murmured. 'Ladies change their minds from one day to another. *Chi lo sa?*'

CHAPTER XXVI

In August Dolores was once more living in Palazzo Barberini. She had fled from Frascati to Villa D'Este. And then she had fled from Villa D'Este back to Frascati. Each time she had been driven by a powerful impulse. And each

time her decisive action had been followed by fear. She had yielded to fear and left Villa D'Este. And now she had yielded to fear and again left Frascati. The small house Sir Theodore had taken was not very comfortable, and Dolores had made that fact an excuse for her return to their beautiful apartment. Sir Theodore had advised her against returning, fearing, or seeming to fear, the effect of the heat in Rome on her health. But she had been firm.

'It is all nonsense about Rome being impossible in summer,' she had said, 'and I am going to prove it nonsense. I can often motor over and spend the day at Frascati if I want to.'

'You must come every day and go back at night.'

But, of course, Dolores had not gone every day. She had never meant to go.

Little Theo had been seriously ill, in danger of death. In some mysterious way his blood had been poisoned. Edna Denzil, already so fearfully warned of the uncertainty of life, was terrified by the sudden malady of her son. From the moment when the first symptoms became manifest she made up her mind that he was going to follow his father to the grave. She told Sir Theodore of her conviction, which she concealed from every one else. And in doing so she displayed the strange nakedness of a soul that sorrow had rather warped than refined.

'Theodore,' she said, 'I've been a fool and I'm having my reward. I've only cared for the few things good women care for, the so-called good women at least. All my heart's been set on my home, my husband, and my children. I've never loved what so many women love—pretty clothes, parties, jewels, money, admirers. I've never wanted to shine, to be witty. I've never cared really one bit for it all. And see how I'm punished! Everything will be taken from me. Franzi has gone. And now Theo will go. It seems to me that God hates simple things, natural goodness. Poor mamma always says I'm naturally good, and could never be anything else. And so, I suppose, God wants to punish me.'

Suddenly she burst into tears.

'What does He want? Oh, what does He want? Will He never leave me alone?'

There had been a sound almost of fury, and certainly of enmity in that cry. And Sir Theodore realized that in her heart his friend, ever since the death of her husband, must have cherished hostility against the God in whom she believed, in whom, perhaps, now, she would have been glad to believe no longer. He tried to comfort her, and almost immediately she dried her tears.

'Do forgive me,' she said. 'If only I could be like other women, like Dolores for instance, and find all my real enjoyment in the so-called pleasures of life, how much happier I could be.'

Sir Theodore had been conscious of a disagreeable feeling that was almost sharp mental pain when she said that. But he only replied:

'We will fight for Theo's life.'

Edna's face changed, softened.

'Oh, Theodore!' she said. 'What should I have done, what should I do now, without your generous, disinterested friendship?'

'I understand you,' he said quietly.

'No one else does.'

In these two sentences, without knowing it, they put into words what was becoming the tragedy of another woman's life. And the desperate illness of little Theo drew them rapidly much nearer together. For during it Edna Denzil saw, as no one else saw—for she alone had the mother's eyes—the intensity of Sir Theodore's love for her child, and his capacity, unusual in a man, for complete unselfishness where his deepest feelings were roused. Instinctively he now hid these things from his wife. He was a sensitive man, and her dislike of the Denzil children, carefully, scrupulously concealed though it was, mysteriously touched his spirit and affected his words and actions.

Although he had had a secret reason for wishing Dolores to remain in Frascati he was more at his ease when she had gone. And he took her view of Rome in the month of August. She declared that Rome was 'Delightfully quiet and fascinating.' No doubt it was. Because people ran away from a place at a certain season, that did not prove that the season was maleficent. And Dolores had told him

that she was seeing all the beautiful things she had not seen properly before.

He began honestly to think, when he thought about the matter at all, that she was having 'a very interesting time.'

But he had few moments just then to give to any thought unconnected with little Theo. Presently the imminent danger of death passed away, and there began the period of hope, sometimes assailed by fear, but on the whole progressive. Edna Denzil and Sir Theodore shared both fear and hope as they watched over the battling child. Day by day they were drawn together more closely by their community of feeling. Meanwhile Dolores had her opportunity of becoming acquainted with Rome in August.

At first she believed that there was no living creature whom she knew left in Rome. And she was glad. She thought she much preferred to see no one. All the palaces were closed. There was no one in the great hotels. Her apartment in Palazzo Barberini was the only one that was tenanted. A silence that almost frightened her sometimes, heavy like some iron weight impending and near its fall, reigned in it and seemed old. She felt as if it were a silence which could be touched. The heat was great, but not overwhelming if one remained within doors during the midmost hours of the day. This Dolores always did.

She often lay down on a sofa in the green and red drawing-room. The windows were protected by awnings and by green blinds which were kept down. Sometimes a breath of wind stirred the blinds, producing a dry, and very small rattling sound. More often they were motionless. Dolores fancied that she felt the stagnant city brooding outside all around the palace in the blaze of the sun, like a thing solidified instead of liquified by the action of heat, its flowing movement and murmur burned out of it. In the great and dim chamber Lenbach's old man regarded her, and his eyes seemed waiting till they should see something that they had not yet seen. And the 'Donna guardando il mare' was surely waiting too, looking over the desolate sea. In these hours of solitude Dolores came to have a very strange feeling about these two pictures with which she had lived so long. Her imagination gave to them life. The woman was alive and expectant—for herself. She was a sort of symbol,

or wraith, of another woman. And the man was alive, that old man, and expectant because he knew what women are, what they do, what they have to do. What an experience of life was in his eyes! Dolores identified herself with the woman watching the sea, and it was the sea of life which throws up strange flot am and jetsam. The old man would not watch for ever in vain. She began to be convinced of this, and to feel that she had always subtly, sub-consciously, known it since she had been in Palazzo Barberini. And she connected the old man's eyes with the thought that still gnawed at her mind. What would he see at last? One day it seemed to her quite suddenly that she knew. So abruptly did the knowledge burst upon her, ripping away defensive barriers, beating down doors, that she almost cried out. Indeed for a moment she believed she had cried out. She had been lying on the sofa. She sprang up, went to the picture, looked into those eyes. Was she attempting defiance? No. She and he shared that knowledge. They were chained to each other by it.

But how could the future be known by a human being with the ordinary capacities and powers of a human being?

That day Dolores went out much earlier than usual, and before the great heat had subsided. She walked till she was tired. She even went on walking when she was tired, until she was almost exhausted. When she went home she found her husband in the palace. She regretted this. She felt as if he must see the knowledge shared by her and the old man, the knowledge which had driven her out into the sun and an empty world, in her eyes, even in the look of her body. But he evidently noticed nothing. He only stayed a short time, and then motored back to Frascati. Little Theo that day had seemed to fall back, and once more Edna and Sir Theodore were ravaged by fear.

It was on the following day that Dolores found there were two people whom she knew still in Rome. She met them both, separately, Lady Sarah Ides close to the Piazza di Siena in the Villa Borghese, and Nurse Jennings, the Irish girl who had helped to nurse Francis Denzil, in the little restaurant on the Pincio where she had gone to have a cup of tea.

Lady Sarah, with a loose and shockingly adjusted veil

over a shady hat, her bag in one hand, an old green parasol in the other, was standing with her back to the garden of the lake watching some airily clad Italian boys running and bicycling on the track around the Piazza. Dolores saw her before she saw Dolores, and hesitated for a moment, debating whether to speak to her or to move quietly away unobserved. Although Dolores almost loved Lady Sarah, that day she felt half afraid of her. Once, a long time ago, she had let Lady Sarah into a secret, perhaps into the secret of her heart. Now she must be reserved with her. She knew that. And truth and sincerity shone in this middle-aged woman who had been tried more even than Edna Denzil had been tried, but who had not been found wanting. And Dolores had another reason which made her now hesitate to accost her friend. Something within her almost dreaded Lady Sarah's absolute rectitude of heart. Perhaps she would have stolen away had not Lady Sarah very suddenly turned round, at the same time dropping the bag, which as usual burst open.

'My dear!' she cried.

Forgetting the bag she surged forward impulsively to clasp the hand of Dolores in hers.

'You have come in from Frascati.'

Through the veil her kind eyes seemed to Dolores to be reading changes in a face that had surely changed very much in the last few weeks.

'You have dropped your bag!'

Dolores picked it up.

'Have I? Oh, everything is coming out. It is always so. I must get a new one. Never mind. I have been in England with my brother-in-law.'

'The doctor?'

'Yes.'

They were both silent for a moment. Then Lady Sarah said:

'Ever since the end of April when I bade you good-bye. I've been seeing a good deal of hospital life.'

She sighed.

'How human beings bear things! It's too splendid, and might force an atheist to believe in God!' she exclaimed.

'Physical things!' said Dolores.

Lady Sarah pushed up her veil in a bunch.

'I heard in England you had gone to Frascati for the summer.'

'Yes. We both like the air there, and the walks are lovely. But for the moment I'm in the palazzo. Why did you come back so soon?'

'Mervyn was going to pay an annual visit in Scotland, and I was getting hard up. Rome is economical in summer. And I love Italy in summer. Don't you?'

Suddenly Dolores realised how thought had killed observation in her while she had been out that day. Till now she had not been aware of the loveliness of this Roman pleasaunce. She had not seen the crested darkness of the pines, the sweet twilight that hides, as if fearing pursuit of its beauty, under the close growing leafage of the ilexes. The long walks had not tempted her feet, nor the grassy lawns soothed her eyes with their nature's colour. She had not even heard the frail song of the fountains.

'Of course,' she replied hastily. 'It is only real Italy then. We were wise to stay.'

'And how are the Denzils?' asked Lady Sarah.

As she put the question there was a sound almost as of constraint in her pleasant, slightly veiled voice.

'Poor little Theo has been desperately ill!'

All the constraint vanished at once from Lady Sarah. She put her hand quickly on the arm of Dolores.

'Oh—no!' she said. 'She can't be intended to go through that. There are some things—' She checked herself, thinking perhaps of her own life's tragedy. 'Is he better?' she asked.

And a whole heart, warm, energetic with love of humanity, seemed in her voice.

'Yes,' Dolores replied.

Lady Sarah looked at her and remained silent.

'He is better, but he is still very ill. Now, dear Lady Sally, I must leave you. But do come to Palazzo Barberini. Will you?'

'But are you going to stay on there?'

'I may. It's deliciously quiet—nobody there but me.'

'You haven't got another dog?'

'No, not yet.'

'Will you let me give you one? I saw one to-day being carried by a man in the Corso, a perfectly delicious puppy, tub-shaped at present—but that will pass!—with an "All's right with the world" expression in its eyes that simply sweeps you to optimism.'

'I couldn't have a puppy in the palace.'

'All your beautiful things! I see.'

She took the hand of Dolores and held it rather closely.

'Your beautiful things!' she repeated. 'And yet, isn't a little bundle of happy life, even if destructive now and then, worth them all—really?'

'You can say that, you who haunt churches and museums, and go so often to stand before the "Pietà"?'

'One takes refuge—yes. One is driven in by the storm. But, oh, my dear! there's nothing in all the art in Rome worth the touch of a hand that loves you.'

Her eyes at that moment looked as if she—she, the soul—were the space of a world away.

'But I do love the beautiful things all the same,' she said. And suddenly she was there by Dolores, with Dolores, again.

'Perhaps we can see some of them together. Shall we? There are no parties now,' she added, with a sort of gentle tentativeness that had in it something extraordinarily delicate. 'Have you a little time for an old woman?'

Dolores longed to kiss her, and longed to be away from her.

'Come to Palazzo Barberini, dear Lady Sally. Come—' She was about to say 'to-morrow' to fix an hour, but she finished with 'Come whenever you like.'

When at half-past five she came into the restaurant on the Pincio, she at once caught sight of Nurse Jennings, who was comfortably established on the small terrace in the open air, with a teapot and a large plate of rather strangely coloured cakes beside her. She had not seen the Irish girl since Francis Denzil's death, but she had known she must see her again. Since the night when they had talked together, before Sir Theodore came back from the children's party, Dolores had felt that this girl would be some day in her life, and intimately. She had a premonition of this.

Nurse Jennings looked up and smiled.

'Oh, it 's Lady Cannynge!' she exclaimed.

Her pleasure was obvious as she got up and, with unembarrassed frankness, came forward to shake hands.

'Let me have tea with you,' said Dolores.

'Yes, do—Lady Cannynge.'

They sat down side by side.

'Well,' began the nurse at once. 'You haven't called for me yet.'

'I!'

'Don't you remember you said how you d like to have me with you if ever you were ill?'

'Yes, I remember.'

Dolores looked long into the healthy freckled face of the nurse.

'Why, what is it?' Nurse Jennings asked.

'I don't know. But I felt I feel you will nurse me some day.'

'Do you? I think I 'd get you well again.'

'I wonder. What makes you think such a thing?'

'Well, I could put a lot of heart into it, I think, nursing you.'

'I 'm glad you feel like that.'

'I do, really.'

'And you think that would make a great difference, would help me to recover, I mean?'

'I expect it would. And yet it 's all against science, I s'pose. And I 'm all for science.'

They talked on cheerfully. Dolores noticed that Nurse Jennings' very self-possessed and honest, and very experienced eyes were often on her face, almost like the eyes of the old man in the portrait. And again that sense of prophetic knowledge assailed her. Did the nurse——?

When tea was over, and Dolores was about to go home, she said:

'What are you thinking about me, nurse?'

'Thinking—Lady Cannynge?'

'Yes. Haven't you been thinking something, nearly all the time we 've been together?'

'I don't know that I have.'

She spoke as if she were considering, perhaps searching herself.

'Have I?' she added.

She sat, looking full at Dolores.

'Even if I have I couldn't rightly say what it is,' she said at last. 'I s'pose one has a lot of queer thoughts that go before one can catch them, like a snake in straw.'

'What an odd simile!'

'Oh, I saw one once, when I was a child. That's why I said that!'

When they parted Dolores asked Nurse Jennings to come and dine with her on the following evening.

She came, and a relation that was akin to friendship was established between them. There was something in the Irish girl which attracted Dolores strongly. Perhaps it was her powerful grip upon the grim facts of life, the calm and the unblushing way in which she stood up to Mother Nature, not in enmity, never in enmity, but in a comradely manner, ready to say, 'That is so, and has got to be so!' to all Mother Nature's dictates. Her knowledge of physiology, her frank way of speaking about facts—by some considered improper—as if they were right and beautiful because they were natural, seemed to clear the mind of Dolores of mists which had, perhaps, gathered there because she had lived for long in the midst of a highly artificial civilisation. For anything that was 'against Nature'—her own phrase—Nurse Jennings had a great contempt. But she was exceedingly lenient in mind towards many who are usually condemned as sinners. And now and then she sturdily enunciated propositions that startled Dolores.

Once, for instance, when discussing the superfluous woman question, which in England had become important, she said:

'I think every woman, if things are to be fair, ought to have a chance to have one child. I don't say more—but one.'

Dolores had immediately turned the conversation from that somewhat delicate subject. But the nurse's remark went down into her mind, to take its place by the gnawing thought that for so long had never ceased from its activity. And it had a powerful influence upon her. For she had from the first looked upon the freckled and radiantly strong Irishwoman as a sort of embodiment of wholesomeness both mental and physical.

'If things are to be fair!' How often during that summer in Rome those words rose in the mind of Dolores. They came to her more than once when she was with Lady Sarah—for she saw Lady Sarah sometimes—and she wondered what Lady Sarah's view on this subject would be. But she never inquired. Something kept her secretly reserved when she was with Lady Sarah. Long afterwards she knew that it was an intention which she must have formed, perhaps months before she was completely aware that she had formed it. Lady Sarah had a strong strain of religion in her. Nurse Jennings, although she was a Catholic, and was very regular in her attendance at Mass, had not. And the woman who sees life only through Nature's eyes is very different from the woman who sees it through the eyes of the God revealed in a religion.

Lady Sarah saw a horizon line shutting out the immense possibilities of God. Nurse Jennings saw a very clearly marked one shutting in the rather crude possibilities of Nature.

In her then condition of mind Dolores did not want to look too far, perhaps lest she should see dark clouds of condemnation. She almost feared Lady Sarah, and sometimes she wished she had never shown her that truth when they sat together in the victoria on the Pincio with Nero enthroned between them. She had opened a door into her soul that day, and she was nearly sure Lady Sarah had stepped in and had seen much. Had she not seen too much?

September came, a golden September, and little Theo was quite out of danger, and was growing stronger day by day. With a radiant face one afternoon Sir Theodore came over to Palazzo Barberini to make the announcement of the child's strides towards health.

'It's his voice which shows it most strongly,' he said, and as he spoke his own bass voice took on a stronger, more resonant tone.

'Poor little chap! It used to be like the voice of a gnat almost. But now!'

He stopped, moved about the room, then came to Dolores and said:

'Doloretta!'

'Yes?'

'Why not come out with me to-day to Frascati? It is a day of rejoicing. Won't you come and share in it? I think—I fancy if you did Edna would feel touched. You have scarcely been over at all, and then only for such a few minutes.'

'I was afraid I should be in the way.'

'I know. Because we were all so intent on Theo, naturally. But it 's different now.'

'Is it?'

'Of course it is. Won't you come? You mourned for Francis. Edna knew that. Won't you take a part in her joy?'

'Yes.'

She got up and went to put on her hat.

'I *will* rejoice! I *will*!' she said to herself.

When she reached her bedroom, instead of only putting on her hat, as she had intended, she changed her gown. She remembered how critically Theo had looked at the gown she had put on for the present-giving on little Theo's birthday. He had thought it too gay. Might he not think the pale brown linen she was wearing to-day not gay enough? Almost like a child that furiously wishes to 'be good' she summoned her maid and got into a festa dress, and a pretty, though simple, hat.

When she came down her husband said:

'What a time you 've been, Doloretta! I thought you were never coming. Let 's be off to Frascati.'

He did not notice the change she had made.

As they were driving in the motor over the vast expanse which was the prey of the sun, Sir Theodore, who had been silent for some time, and who had more than once glanced at Dolores rather doubtfully, or critically (she was not sure which) said:

'It 's very good of you to come, Doloretta.'

'Good! what nonsense! Isn't it natural I should come on a day of joy to congratulate friends?'

He obviously hesitated. Then he said:

'I hope you don't mind my saying something.'

The almost diffidence with which he spoke, the evident discomfort and reserve, showed her the gap which was now between them.

'Of course not. What is it?'

'I wish you could manage really to look upon Edna as your friend.'

'But, Theo—what do you mean?'

There was a sort of firm, deliberate surprise in her voice.

'Of course I look upon Edna as my friend. She has always been charming to me.'

'I know she has. She could not be anything else. But since Francis died I have sometimes thought it was only him you were fond of, that you did not care about Edna. And—I don't know, of course, but sometimes I have thought, too, that Edna had some suspicion of it.'

'But what have I done, or left undone?'

'Well, you hurried away from Frascati to Como after we had taken the house.'

'I came back directly I knew you could not join me.'

'Yes, but you did not remain at Frascati. And you scarcely ever come over.'

'My dear Theo,' she said, smiling. 'But I am coming over now!'

For the moment she said no more. The fact that he wished her to be at Frascati for Edna's sake, lest Edna might feel secretly offended or surprised, made Dolores feel as if her heart were as hard as the emerald she had won at the bridge tournament. She remembered the jewel's ugliness to her touch in the dark, and it seemed to her that her husband, in a strange ignorance, was setting out to compass his own dishonour. When they were not far from the foot of the hill which ascends to Frascati he spoke again.

'There is a special reason,' he said, still with obvious reserve and discomfort, 'why I think it would be much better if you and Edna saw a little more of each other.'

'Is there? What is it?'

'Well, Dolores, we live in the world, and must remember the evil eyes and the sharp tongues. Nobody, perhaps, has been more trained to consciousness of their existence than one who has been a diplomat, as I have. Rome is a watchful old lady'—as he continued he evidently became more uncomfortable, and was trying to speak more lightly and

easily—'and can be very *mauvaise langue*. I cannot help thinking that if you are not a good friend to Edna people may begin to talk.'

'But what about?' Dolores asked, with an air of gentle ignorance. 'He shall say it! I'll make him say it!' she was saying in that heart which felt hard.

'It's very absurd of course, but about my seeing so much of Edna. Naturally, I could never care for such nonsense on my own account. But she has no man now to protect her, and it is my duty to think for her in these matters. You see my position.'

'Could people really be so silly?'

'We must remember that Edna is still young!' he observed, almost as if he were slightly nettled.

'Yes, that's true. Well, what is it you wish me to do?'

'I think it would be wise if you saw a little more of Edna, were more intimate with her. It would make things appear in their true light.'

'It's a little difficult now, because Edna never comes to Rome, never comes to see me.'

'There's a good reason for that.'

'Is there?'

'You know it as well as I do. Rome has terrible memories for Edna, and especially Palazzo Barberini.'

'I did not people the Palazzo with them.'

'No, of course not. But it is obviously far easier for you to visit Edna than for Edna to visit you.'

Dolores said nothing. She feared to say something she would regret.

'But perhaps——' Sir Theodore began. He stopped, looked at his wife, and continued, 'perhaps it bores you coming to Frascati, entering into such a homely family circle? Perhaps you don't care for the children and their prattle? I know it is not every one who can care for the simple things. And you are such a success.'

'I—a success!'

'To be sure, with your prizes for tournaments, and your skating feats, and your salon.'

'Would you have me an utter failure?'

'I certainly would not wish you to be bored because of me.'

'We'll see how I get on to-day,' she said, laughing. 'How seriously you take everything—now!'

She forced irony into her voice, but indeed she felt a faint sense of irony. There are few women who have not wondered sometimes at the naïveté of the men they love. Dolores almost wondered now. Yet she knew that Theodore was cleverer than she was. But not about the things of the heart! In those was he not as a blind man stumbling in a darkness that might be felt? Or—was he wilfully blind?

An arrow of jealousy pierced her.

'Things that are serious ought to be taken seriously,' said Sir Theodore, with unusual emphasis. 'We all know how tiresome the people are who take frivolous things solemnly. But those who take the vital things frivolously are worse than merely tiresome.'

'Is that a rebuke to me?' she asked, still smiling, and with more irony.

'No. But I must confess I don't think you always quite appreciate what is important in human life and what is not.'

The motor turned to the left, and came into the straight bit of road which leads to the Piazza Romana.

'I must try to learn from you,' she answered.

He said nothing more.

CHAPTER XXVII

THAT day Edna Denzil was happier than she had been since her Franzi died. She had emerged from a great fear, and her fear had taught her sharply a lesson. For months she had been brooding over the thought of what she had not. Now she realised how much she still had, so much that God might yet take away from her, if He chose! Because He had chosen to spare her son, Edna was able at last to turn to Him although He had snatched away her husband. She was able to do what she had not done for a very long time: to go quietly and alone to a church, to kneel down and thank

Him. As the Cannynge's motor ascended the hill, observed by Mrs. Massingham who, as usual, was installed in the red loggia, with the *Italie*, a novel, and a piece of embroidery, Edna Denzil came alone from the Cathedral of San Pietro, where she had been praying before a picture of Saint Anthony of Padua.

She had found the big church almost deserted, despite its coolness. Only three or four venerable unfortunates, who looked centuries old, and as if their faces had been slowly carved out of some dark material by the ruthless hands of time and tribulation, prayed, muttered, or slept in dim corners, ready, however, to emerge in search of alms if occasion presented itself. They had all emerged in honour of Edna, and she had given alms to all. Then, when they had retreated to their corners and returned to their orisons or their watchful slumbers, she had knelt down before Saint Anthony. He was close to the door and he carried on his arm a child. Two candles burned before him. Some humble bunches of flowers lay at his feet. And lying close to them in a cheap little frame was a 'Preghiera a S. Antonio di Padova,' beginning with the words: 'O most gracious Saint Antonio, hear my humble voice.'

But Edna did not pray to any saint or even to Madonna. She was able, indeed she felt obliged, to communicate directly with God. And as she did so she felt an immeasurable relief, as she did so she was aware of her long bitterness, she knew the torture that wrings the soul which rebels against the decrees it cannot understand. Only then, when she escaped from it, did she truly know it.

She prayed for a long time, and in that prayer found renewal. In thanking she obtained. True gratitude receives the most sacred gifts, and Edna knew that in the peace which descended upon her soul. She shed some tears while she prayed. And they gave a stronger, a more lovely life to the flowers springing up in her heart.

She came out into the sun-scorched piazza before the Cathedral with the drops of the holy water still wet upon her forehead. And as she did so, as she stood at the top of the steps for a moment and looked at the triple fountain bubbling among its ferns at the base of the barrack-like building which sternly rises above it, as she heard the clang of the

bells that ring untiringly out over the vines and the olives, as if sending their message to Rome, mother of all messages of bells of all Catholic churches, she wondered if Franzi could see her. At this moment, for the first time since his death, she felt as if he were alive. And she felt that because she had renewed the true life in her soul.

She crossed the Piazza, and came out before the Pension Belle Vue, and in the distance she heard the sound of a motor, running between the double rows of trees that shelter the public walks by the garden over which Garibaldi presides on a marble pedestal. In a moment she saw that it was Sir Theodore's motor, and as it drew up she stood on the path by its door, full of her new-found peace; which was happiness, not such as she had once known, but such as was prepared for her now, at this stage in the long pilgrimage. And as the door opened she met the eyes, not of Sir Theodore, whom she was expecting to see, but of Dolores.

She was surprised. Yet at this moment she would have been ready to be cordial, almost in the way of that Edna Denzil who had dined one night in Palazzo Barberini to bless a roof tree. But directly she met the eyes of Dolores she felt as if something in her withered up. Yet those eyes were smiling above smiling lips. A hand clasped hers, and even held it while kind words were spoken.

'I heard of your joy and I came over with Theo to share it, if you will let me.'

Those were the words in her ears. She, too, smiled. She returned the hand clasp. But joy's effortless ease was gone for the moment right out of her life.

Sir Theodore got out, and at once Edna saw that he was no longer the happy, the almost exultant man who had left her but a few hours ago.

'When shall I tell Pietro to come for you?' he asked his wife.

'How long can you bear my company, Edna?' she said, smiling.

Edna made a strong effort to recapture the feeling of happiness, of goodness, that had descended upon her in the church, and had made her at peace with herself and with the world.

'Stay a long while, if you don't mind our dull little house

and ways. I always feel we are quite dreadfully domestic, Dolores. Stay till after dinner, won't you?'

'Oh, I think that would be almost too late. Besides I've got——' she was about to say 'Nurse Jennings dining with me.' But she remembered about Francis, and after a pause she said, 'I've got some one dining with me to-night.'

'Have you? Who is it?' said Sir Theodore, as if in an effort to make cheerful conversation.

'Nurse Jennings,' she said quickly. 'Let me stay for an hour, Edna. At half-past six, Pietro!'

The chauffeur took off his cap, and they turned and descended the steps.

The mention of Nurse Jennings had sharply recalled to Edna's mind all the horror of the operation and Francis's death. She had never seen the nurse since then, and could not bear even to think of her. And as she had never heard of any friendship between her and Dolores she was surprised at the mention of the dinner. She tried to dismiss the matter at once from her mind. But she could not. She was back in Palazzo Barberini. She was with Franzi on the sofa waiting for his summons to get ready. She recalled the long time when she and Theodore sat together in silence waiting to know the verdict. Her prayer in the Cathedral of San Pietro had released her from bitterness, and the bitterness did not now return. But the great sadness did, with a sense of the terrible realities which make up such a large part of life. She did not find any words to break the silence which had fallen till they were coming into the house. And then her words were banal.

'Don't you find it very dull in Rome at this time, Dolores?'

'Well, it isn't deliriously gay, Edna. I confess that.'

Sir Theodore, who was behind them, frowned.

'And the heat?'

'Oh, that's quite bearable, if one shuts oneself up during the middle of the day.'

'You ought to come out here more.'

'That's what I tell Doloretta,' said Sir Theodore's deep bass from behind.

'To cheer you all up!' said Dolores.

Silence again fell, till they reached the first floor.

'Is little Theo up?' asked Dolores.

'On a *chaise longue* in the loggia. But he must very soon go to bed.'

'How happy you must be feeling!'

'I am very thankful indeed.'

She opened a door, and they came into the sitting-room which gave on to the loggia. Through the French windows Dolores saw the broad back and large brown head of Mrs. Massingham. This head was nodding, and a thread of soprano voice, very small, but clear and sweet, was audibly singing:

> Come si fa la pace,
> Schiude Berlin la bocca,
> Ei guarda, pensa, tace,
> Ed un bel bacio scocca.'

Dolores stood still.

'Wait!' she murmured. 'Don't let us go out till it's finished.' The round head continued to nod, backwards and forwards, and from one side to the other, as if the singer were conducting in a new way without a baton.

> Pace che vince il cuore,
> E che disarma ratta,
> Che scarca il malumore,
> Che collera ha distatta –
> Pace che chiede scusa
> Muta teneramente
> Pace così conclusa
> Dura sicuramente.'

The song ceased and the head stopped nodding. Then a small voice, with a touching gentleness and simplicity in it, said:

'Thank you, Nonna. I'm sure I should hate to quarrel now.'

'Is that Theo speaking?' said Dolores.

'Yes,' said Edna.

Dolores saw that her eyes were full of tears.

'No one should ever quarrel. But why now, dear?' said Mrs. Massingham.

'I don't know. But I feel now as if I liked every one.'

'That 's a very nice feeling.'

'Yes, isn't it, Nonna?'

Dolores went on, passed through the French window and came into the loggia.

'Then you must like my Theo!' she said.

She went straight up to a long chair, on which was a tiny form covered with a rug, a head with carefully brushed brown hair supported by cushions, and, bending down, kissed the pale little face that had turned towards her.

In doing this she had not so much yielded to as attacked a good impulse, but when she saw the expression in the little boy's eyes, and heard him say, 'Of course. But that 's nothing, is it, because you 're our friend!' she felt she could love this child—as indeed naturally she loved all children—if only she were allowed to be her true self. But oh, to have a son of her own! To be the rightful owner, the jealous possessor of a child! To see a child turn naturally first to her, put her before every one, even its father!

'You dear, pretty creature! Why I thought you were never coming near us any more.'

Mrs. Massingham blinked rapidly as she kissed Dolores.

She loved beauty, and secretly had a strong leaning towards things that were brilliant and persons who shone. Plunged in domesticity as she was, and thoroughly happy in it, she nevertheless could not entirely detach her mind from the great world. And since she had read so much about Dolores in the Italian papers Dolores had become in her eyes an embodiment of all that her own dear daughter was not. She loved Edna, but she had sometimes wished that Edna were a tiny bit more worldly, more *mondaine*. Now, of course, that was impossible. Mrs. Massingham was quite Italian in her view of the suitable life for a widow.

'Sit down beside me and tell me something of your wonderful life in Rome,' she added, keeping her hand on the hand of Dolores, and drawing her into one of the straw chairs with red cushions.

Edna Denzil and Sir Theodore went over to little Theo, bent over him, then sat down by him. And by the way they went, together, by their whole manner of being with each other as soon as she was—as it were—detached from them, Dolores gathered their much greater intimacy.

There on the *chaise longue* lay the link which held them so tightly together.

'My wonderful life, dear Mrs. Massingham!'

'Yes, yes. I follow all you are doing in the newspapers.'

'Now! what fascinating reading it must make! Lady Cannynge walked alone in the Villa Borghese! Lady Cannynge sat at home and read Dyer's *Modern Europe*. Lady Cannynge dined alone on a bowl of soup at eight, and went to bed at nine! The journalists must be at their wits' end for topics?'

Mrs. Massingham laughed. She loved to laugh, and thought very small things, if said by people whom she liked, extremely amusing.

'You are as witty as you are pretty,' she said, patting the hand she still held. 'But are you really alone like that? I don't approve of that at all.'

She was about to raise her voice and say something to Sir Theodore, who was talking to little Theo and Edna, but Dolores stopped her.

'No, no. I'm not. I have Lady Sarah—all sorts of people. I talk to the men on duty in the museums.'

'But, my dear child——'

'Why, even to-night I have a regular dinner-party.'

'That's much better.'

'One woman. Oh, but a very nice one!'

'A woman!' said Mrs. Massingham, turning her large round eyes slowly from her pretty hand, at which she had glanced, as she very often did, to the face of Dolores. 'How the Italians must admire you, all the smart men, I mean, in Rome.'

'I hope so,' said Dolores, smiling, and trying to hear what the group of three at the other end of the loggia were talking about so busily. 'But there are no smart men in Rome now. So I have to put up with women.'

'Are you like Vi?' inquired Mrs. Massingham seriously.

'In what way?'

'Vi can't bear women. She only cares for men.'

'No, I like women very much. I like you, dear Mrs. Massingham.'

And this was true. Mrs. Massingham was the only person

with whom Dolores could feel at her ease in the house at Frascati.

'But where is Vi?' Dolores added. 'And where is Iris?'

'They were sent out for a donkey ride to give Theo a rest. Edna! She doesn't hear me.'

Mrs. Massingham turns a more round in her chair.

'Edna! Edna!'

'Yes, mamma. What is it?'

Edna looked round. A laugh was just dying away from her lips and eyes.

'When will the children be back?'

'I expect them every minute.'

She turned again to the two Theos. And the tiny laugh of the still weak boy rose up in chorus with Sir Theodore's big bass sound.

'Do you know,' Mrs. Massingham assumed an almost portentously mysterious manner, as she leant a little nearer to Dolores—'do you know, I really think she is beginning to get over it!'

'Edna, do you mean?'

'Hush, my dear! Yes, Edna! She must not know I think it. People don't like such thoughts. But since Theo is out of danger she is a different creature. I can't tell you what I have suffered with her all this long time.'

'Have you?'

'Yes, seeing her so changed, like a stone almost, except when your husband was here.'

'He cheered her up, I hope.'

'I think he did. But I couldn't. I am so glad you are so happy with him.'

Again she pressed the hand of Dolores.

'Edna told me once.'

'Told you! What, dear Mrs. Massingham?'

'That your husband had a golden nature—I remember the very words, they were so odd!—and therefore that you were a very happy woman!'

'A golden nature!'

'Yes. Wasn't it an odd expression? But I quite understood what was meant, as no doubt you do. Edna has an extraordinary opinion of your husband.'

'I am so glad.'

'Yes. And whatever men may say women can really judge a man best. I am sure I never saw any human being more devoted than he is to children. They really worship him.'

'Do they? Dear little things!'

Mrs. Massingham again looked mysterious, and leaned towards Dolores, protruding her large head, and opening her eyes very wide.

'If—hush!—if little Theo had died like his father I don't know what your husband would have done. I don't think he could have borne it.'

'We have to bear things, dear Mrs. Massingham.'

'Ah—I know! I know! But there are some things that are too much.'

'Yes,' said Dolores, again looking towards the group of three.

'And when *they* come—well, my dear child!'

Mrs. Massingham lifted her pretty little hands, raised her chin, and made a face suggestive of cataclysm.

'And I don't think we should judge them!' she continued, oracularly, having apparently thought continuously through the hiatus in her language. 'But, of course, we always do!'

'I don't think I should care whether I were judged or not, if I had done what I was obliged to do,' said Dolores.

And there was an almost hard sound in her voice.

'You!' said Mrs. Massingham. 'Why, you dear, pretty creature, nobody could ever judge you. They could only pity you. But, thank God, there is no need for that. My Edna was right. You are a happy woman.'

At this moment there was a sound of shrill voices, a patter of feet, the door opened, and Iris and Viola appeared, rosy, beaming, and excited from their donkey ride. Iris carried in her hand a whip almost as big as herself, which Dolores recognised at once as her present to little Theo on his last birthday. She walked firmly towards the loggia, with her legs rather wide apart, in a manner suggesting that she rode almost as often as the average cavalry officer, and that she always rode astride. And as she came in she announced twice:

'My donkey tumbled down! My donkey tumbled down!'

Behind her the little Viola, dressed in white, with a shady

white hat, peeped with anxious eyes, perhaps to see whether any men were of the party.

'My donkey tumbled down!' repeated Iris loudly, for the third time, as she gained the French windows giving on to the loggia.

'My donkey didn't tumbum down!' cried Viola, taking hold of her sister's skirt with one hand, bending and looking round Iris, as if she were a corner, at the assemblage in the loggia.

As her eyes reached Sir Theodore she smiled with a coquettish expression, withdrew her head behind the rampart of her sister's body, then peeped again, while the rosy flush deepened over her little face.

'Tumbled down!' said Mrs. Massingham. 'But how dangerous, my darling! What a bad little donkey!'

She and Dolores were nearest to the window where the two children were standing.

'Come and tell us all about it!' she added, holding out her hand.

'Yes, Iris, and give me a kiss!' said Dolores, smiling. 'I've come over to play you a tune.'

Iris stepped into the loggia, leaving the window free for Viola, who immediately made a sort of half-shy, half-imperious dart at Sir Theodore, avoiding Dolores by means of a dexterous curve, and threw herself upon him as if he were a rightful prey, but a prey full of unexpected possibilities. He caught her up and kissed her.

'Now, Iris!' said Dolores, almost sharply, and bending down to the child.

'No, I don't want to!'

'But——!'

'I don't want to!' repeated Iris, twisting her face and avoiding the proffered kiss.

'Never mind then' said Dolores.

But she felt as if some one had struck her.

'Tell us about the bad little donkey!' exclaimed Mrs. Massingham, looking uncomfortable. 'And then I daresay kind, dear Lady Cannynge will play you a pretty tune.'

'But he wasn't bad. And I don't want a tune to-day.'

At this moment Edna, who was very particular about her children's manners, and with a mother's instinct had guessed

that something was not quite as it should be, got up and came quickly over to Iris.

'What is it?' she asked.

'Nothing!' said Dolores hastily. 'Iris was going to tell us about her donkey.'

'I'm afraid when the donkey fell Iris dropped her manners,' said Mrs. Mainingham, almost severely.

'I must go and speak to Vi,' said Dolores, getting up.

Her face was faintly flushed. She went over to her husband and Viola. The little girl was still in his arms, and with both her tiny hands was very carefully and intently arranging his thick hair, trying to smooth it down on each side of the partings.

'Why, what is Vi doing to your hair, Theo?' said Dolores. 'Isn't she satisfied with the way you wear it?'

She tried to speak gaily, with a good-humoured chiding intonation; but, despite herself, the irony which Sir Theodore had been unpleasantly aware of in the motor crept again into her voice. Viola turned her head, looked at Dolores, then abruptly turned her head away. She began to writhe in Sir Theodore's arms.

'I wants to get down!' she whispered to him, making a face.

He put her down at once, and she immediately ran over to her mother and Iris.

'What was she doing to your hair?' Dolores said.

Her eyes and her husband's met, and for a moment—a long moment it seemed—gazed. And while Dolores looked at her husband the effort she made to retain hardihood sent through her a hideous sensation of seeming, almost of actually being, impudent, as a bad woman is impudent.

'Doing! I don't know. Who knows what little children are up to?' he returned.

He put up his brown hands to his head, and Dolores saw a distinct, though only passing, expression of active hostility in his eyes. And she knew that at that moment her husband wished her far away from him, and from those he was with.

'Vi's always up to something with Uncle Theo,' said little Theo's weak and gentle voice from the *chaise longue*. 'She can't leave Uncle Theo alone. She *is* naughty.'

'Is she?' said Dolores.

Her voice was almost choked in her throat. She sat down quickly by the boy. He, at least, still treated her as a friend. She took his thin hand in hers, trying to feel very tender. How she hated that atrophied feeling about her heart! How she dreaded what she was becoming at that moment!

'Is she?' she repeated, clearing her throat with a faint little sound which told Sir Theodore nothing.

'I don't mean really naughty like bad people,' little Theo explained, with a peculiar marvel of manner that seemed to spring from his state of health, 'who do awful things, you know. I only mean that she does go for Uncle Theo the whole time.'

Sir Theodore got up and went after Vi, pulling at his pointed beard with a hand that looked nervous. Dolores saw that he did not wish to hear what he did not wish her to hear. But he was too subtle to stop little Theo, and the boy went on, in his delicate voice, telling Dolores about the life of her husband in this family when she was away. She had seen something of the family life, even too much, when she had stayed against her will at Frascati. But she now realised that even when he had played in the little garden before the Pavilion with the children, her husband had never been really natural, had never quite abandoned himself to the spirit that had captured them so easily, so thoroughly. Her presence had cast a shadow.

Soon Edna came over and interrupted the talk of her son.

'Theo,' she said, 'you must go to bed.'

'Oh, must I? O mums, do let me stay a little longer!'

'Yes, do, Edna,' said Dolores, with an almost anxious earnestness. It had come to this, that she felt as if the removal to another room of little Theo would leave her without a friend. For the moment she forgot Mrs. Massingham, she thought only of the children, their mother and her husband.

Edna Denzil looked doubtful.

'Do, Edna—for me!'

Sir Theodore came up.

'Now, Theo, old boy—bedtime!' he said, in his deep voice, bending down to take the child up.

'But, Theodore,' said Dolores. 'We want——'

'What is it?' said her husband, straightening up.

'Dolores wants Theo to stay up a little longer,' said Edna.

'But you said to your mother just now that he had already been up too long.'

'I asked that he might stay,' said Dolores.

'But he mustn't,' said Sir Theodore.

'But, Edna, weren't you going to allow him to?' said Dolores, in a voice that was almost agitated in its pressing eagerness.

'Well, I don't really think I ought to,' replied Edna, but with obvious hesitation.

'My dear Dolores,' said Sir Theodore, without any hesitation, 'a mother, and only a mother, can judge in such matters, and Edna said it was time for Theo to go to bed. You must not interfere in the kindness of your heart, or you will do mischief which we might all regret, and no one more than you. Come, Theo!'

And he took the child up with loving strength and carried him off to bed.

When he returned Dolores was saying good-bye to Mrs. Massingham, who was stroking her hand and begging her soon to return.

'You bring us a whiff of the great world, my dear,' Mrs. Massingham was saying, 'and that is good for us. We live quite buried. Of course it is very nice,' she hastily added, fearing to hurt her daughter's feelings, 'and very healthy, but still we need waking up now and then. And you are so brilliant.'

She looked at Dolores with a sort of large and maternal admiration.

'When your eyes shine like that you are just like a jewel,' she added.

'My dear Mrs. Massingham, what a flatterer you are!' said Dolores, hastily bending to kiss Mrs. Massingham, and releasing her hand, but gently. 'Good-bye, Edna,' she said in a moment, turning to Edna who was standing by the parapet of the loggia.

'But I will come with you as far as the motor.'

'Indeed you mustn't.'

'Are you going already, Dolores?' said her husband.

'Yes, I must.'

'I don't think Pietro will be there yet. You said at half-past six, and——'

He was about to take out his watch, when she said decisively:

'Good-bye, Theodore. Perhaps I shall see you to-morrow. Good-bye, Iris. Good-bye, little Viola!'

She blew them two laughing kisses, but she did not touch them.

'I really am coming,' said Edna.

'Only to the steps then. It's very dear of you.'

She was gone.

'I'll be back in a moment,' Edna said, looking at Sir Theodore.

'Yes.'

He had made a movement as if to go with his wife. Then he stood still and caught up Viola.

'We'll look out to see the motor going down the hill to the Campagna, won't we, Vi?'

'Yes,' she replied. 'Won't we!'

And once more she began with both hands to smooth his thick hair.

'I'll come to the top of the steps, Dolores,' Edna said. 'I'm really afraid you will have to wait for the motor. It isn't half-past six.'

'Pietro's a very punctual person. I must tell you how glad I am about little Theo.'

They began to go slowly up the wide steps, walking side by side.

Edna's new joy, and the way in which she had commemorated it by the visit to the cathedral, made her much less self-concentrated, less egoistic, than she had been in her long bitterness of grief. She was able to-day to have kind thoughts for another woman, even to see more clearly than she had since the death of Francis how this other woman might be affected by the apparently trivial incidents of life.

'Thank you, Dolores,' she said quite warmly. 'I did wish so much that your dear thought for old Theo——'

'Old Theo!' said Dolores sharply.

'Little Theo——'

'Oh, yes.'

'I did wish he could have stayed up longer, but——'

'Oh, it was much better for him to go to bed. And now, Edna, I'm not going to let you come another step. No—really! Good-bye, and thank you for a delightful hour. I feel that little Theo's going to get quite strong, and that you're out of all your troubles at last. Good-bye. Next time I come I shall bring some toys, or dolls, or something, for the little ones; a Teddy Bear, a white one, for Vi—and I'll find something that will please Iris and Theo too.'

She hardly knew what she was saying. She turned and went quickly to the road. Pietro was not there. She looked at her watch. It was only a quarter-past six. For a quarter of an hour she wandered about alone in the small public garden. Then the motor arrived. As she descended the hill she looked across the waste ground, and, beyond and above the station, she saw the house with the loggia, and figures standing by the baby trade. One was very tall, and against it there was a patch of white.

Theo holding Viola!

Dolores leaned back in the motor and shut her eyes.

When she reached Palazzo Barberini that evening, and came into the hall of the apartment, she saw a card lying on the marble table that stood close to the front door. She picked it up, and read the name of Cesare Carelli.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THAT night Nurse Jenning came to dine with Dolores at eight o'clock. Her experienced eyes saw at once that, as she would have expressed it, 'something was wrong with Lady Cannynge.' At dinner Dolores talked a great deal, was indeed much more lively than usual. But there was to the nurse something unpleasant in her liveliness. It did not sound or seem natural. And anything that she could not consider natural always set the Irishwoman on her guard, even made her feel almost hostile, unless she could trace it back to some physical cause. If she could do that then

her nursing instinct at once came into play, and she was interested, ready to help, perhaps even pitiful, in her calm and thoroughly self-possessed manner.

After dinner the two women went to sit in the green and red drawing-room. Dolores lit a cigarette. The nurse never smoked. Indeed she thought smoking a 'filthy habit,' but she did not say so. She was comfortably installed in an armchair, and Dolores half sat, half lay, curled up on a sofa, watching the little rings of smoke mount up and disperse in the great high room. Her liveliness had left her now dinner was over, but there was a faint flush in her usually white cheeks and her eyes were glittering. They looked, thought Nurse Jennings, like those of a fever patient.

'Have you ever been ill, Lady Cannynge?' she asked.

'No, not dangerously ill. Why do you ask, nurse?'

'I don't know. It just came into my head.'

'You don't think I look ill to-night?'

'I don't think you look your best.'

'Don't I?'

With a brusque, but graceful movement Dolores was on her feet. She crossed the room quickly and stared at herself in a glass. And it seemed to her as if she looked at a bad woman, but at a woman who had been forced to be bad against her will, almost against her nature. Coming away from the mirror she went to the piano and sat down on the piano stool.

'Oh yes, do play, Lady Cannynge, please!' said Nurse Jennings. She came to sit near the piano.

'You would really like it?'

'Indeed I should. You do play so well.'

'Somebody refused to hear me play to-day.'

'Refused to hear you! Whoever could that be?'

'Somebody at Frascati. What shall I play?'

She struck the keys powerfully, filling the room with sound, improvised for a moment, stopped abruptly.

'Oh, don't stop!' exclaimed the nurse, drawing her chair closer to the piano.

'But I must think of something to play. That was only nonsense out of my own head. Wait a minute.'

Dolores had an excellent memory and played much music without notes. Now she thought of various composers,

Of late she had given herself to the ultra-modern musicians to Debussy, Cyril Scott, Ravel, and others. She had come to understand, and even to delight in their strange and elusive effects, their often pale subtleties, their intricate care in avoiding the obvious, their mother-of-pearl mannerisms, and their occasional touches of moonlight mysticism. But now in thought she rejected them and their works as unreal, bloodless, tearless. And her mind went back to the great classics. But they seemed to her too robust, too gloriously sane, too free from the cruel fever of life and the agony at the soul of human things.

Nurse Jennings sat watching her, but at this moment Dolores was quite unself-conscious. And the nurse thought that she had never seen a sadder face than the face now bending over the keys of the piano. She tried to think that this tragic look, which quite troubled her, might be caused by the way the light fell on Lady Cannynge, then that Lady Cannynge's face always looked rather sad simply because of her colouring, the shape of her features, the depth of darkness in her large eyes, and the duskiness of her hair. Nevertheless she continued to be troubled. 'She 's quite changed to-night!' the nurse said to herself. 'She isn't herself at all!'

At last Dolores began to play. She played four preludes of Chopin, each one, the nurse thought, more sad than its forerunner. Then she stopped.

'I can't think of anything to-night,' she said. 'Anything that 's really music has always seemed to me to be able to express more than any other art — till to-night. But to-night it doesn't seem to me to be able to express anything. Life is so sad, and the sadness is so—so deep. And the sadness of music is shallow, I think now. But there 's just one thing I know that is unutterably sad, out of a symphony by Tchaikovsky. Of course one ought to have the orchestra. But even on the piano — —!'

She began to play again, and continued for several minutes.

'Isn't that terribly sad, nurse?' she asked, stopping.

'Terribly—indeed!'

'Terribly sad, and terribly true.'

She came away from the piano, and stood for a moment looking at the Lenbach old man. Nurse Jennings noticed

that she was perpetually clenching and unclenching her hands.

'How I hate this apartment!' she suddenly cried out, turning round.

'Lady Cannynge! and it is so beautiful and splendid!'

'How I hate it, and oh! how I hate Rome!'

'Why?'

'Shall I tell you?'

She sat down close to the nurse. Something ungovernable seemed to her to have suddenly arisen within her, beating, clamouring for outlet.

'Shall I tell you?' she repeated, looking into the nurse's face with intensity.

'If it's right that it should be told!' Nurse Jennings replied with firmness.

'You do like me?'

'I do, Lady Cannynge. You're a true lady.'

'A lady—oh! I'm a human being! That's all!'

'And enough too!'

Dolores put her hand on the nurse's knee.

'Enough! Isn't it too much?'

'Why too much?'

'Because a human being has pride, and nerves, and a brain, and a heart—so much that can be wounded, humbled, tortured.'

'What is the matter, Lady Cannynge? Ah the evening I've seen that you were not at all yourself.'

'I am myself. It's just that. You've never seen me myself till to-night—never, never!'

'I'm sorry if that's so.'

'I've always been pretending—pretending——'

She burst into tears.

Nurse Jennings took hold of her hand gently, but firmly, and held it. She did not express any surprise or concern, or make any endeavour to stop Dolores from weeping. And her manner, her touch, made Dolores able to weep on unashamed, even glad in the relief she was obtaining. She even leaned her head against the nurse's shoulder. At last her sobs ceased. She felt about for something.

'What is it, Lady Cannynge?'

'A handkerchief,' Dolores whispered.

'Here—here!'

The fingers of Dolores closed on the handkerchief. She wiped her eyes. Still the tears came. She wiped her eyes again, shut them for a moment, and sat up.

'You said once to me,' she began, in an uneven, and sometimes choked voice, 'that if everything was fair every woman ought to be given a chance to have one child. I haven't got a child. I want to have a child! I want to have a child!'

Her voice rose on the last sentence.

'Yes, yes! Is that it?'

'I want to have a child!'

'Many women that are married and have no children feel it terribly just like you do, and nobody knows.'

Dolores shook her head.

'Not as I do!' she said.

'Yes, Lady Cannyfige.'

'I can't bear it—not having a child. The women you mean want a child only for themselves. But I want one for myself—yes, but not only for myself.'

'Your husband?'

'Yes. It isn't only that I want to have a child. I *need* to have a child.'

A stern, fixed, and almost—the nurse thought—terrible look came into her face. She sat staring straight down at the floor.

'I need to have a child!' she repeated, not moving her eyes, and in a voice that sounded fatal.

'Don't speak like that!'

'Why?'

Dolores looked up.

'It doesn't sound like you speaking. Never mind about lady or not lady. But I don't like to hear any woman speak just like that.'

'No? But you haven't told me why.'

'Because it doesn't sound to me natural.'

Dolores was silent for a minute. Then she said:

'Nurse, do you know how old I am?'

'No, indeed.'

'How old should you think?'

'Perhaps—twenty-seven.'

'I am thirty.'

'Young enough still. Why shouldn't you hope to have child yet? There's no reason against it, is there?'

Her eyes met the eyes of Dolores in a straight, clear look.

'Only—so far as I know—that God hasn't chosen that we should have a child.'

'Ah!'

'And because of that——' Dolores paused, looked at Nurse Jennings, then moved a little nearer to her—because of that my husband—my husband——'

'Yes? Oh, what is it, Lady Cannynge? I can see that you had much better say it.'

'He doesn't care for me any more.'

She looked down again, and a slow flush crept over her face, up to her hair, down to her neck. Slowly it died partly away, leaving her face and neck mottled with red.

'Never say that!' cried Nurse Jennings. 'Oh, Lady Cannynge, never say that!'

'It's true. He never will care for me again unless I give him a child.'

'Everybody must care for you.'

'And d' you think I want my husband to care for me in that way!' Dolores cried, with a fierceness that startled the nurse.

'You *do* care about him!' she said slowly.

'Yes. That's why I cried.'

There was a long silence.

'And that's why I hate this apartment!' Dolores resumed in a voice that was now low and steady, and almost withdrawn. 'And that's why I hate Rome. I want to get away. I want to get him away. But he won't come. I shall never be able to make him come. And, do you know——' Again she put her hand on the nurse's arm. 'He blames me because we have no child.'

'Does he say so?'

'No. But he makes me feel it, every day and all the time.'

'That's how men are! And the Holy Mother knows it,' said Nurse Jennings, speaking with a strong brogue.

'If they are like that then——'

'What is it, Lady Cannynge—my dear?'

'They oughtn't to be surprised at anything a woman does.'

'But they are though, always. And what 's more they always will be.'

Dolores began to cry again, but without passion, silently, with a sort of almost childlike helplessness.

'Why are they like that?' she murmured.

'Because it 's Nature! It 's so and has got to be so, Lady Cannynge—my dear. Now, don't cry any more. You had to at first, and it was good you should cry. But not now!'

She spoke firmly, almost like one issuing a command.

And Dolores, to her own surprise, almost immediately was able to obey her.

They talked quietly for a little while. Then Nurse Jennings got up to go. She was standing close to the portrait of the old man when, pursuing their conversation, she said:

'It would be a good thing, though, if men had it brought home to them a good deal oftener than they do.'

'You mean that it isn't always our fault?' said Dolores.

'And I 'd go farther than that, Lady Cannynge,' returned Nurse Jennings with her characteristic decision, which was free from any hint of temper or violence. 'I 'd say that it is just as often, and perhaps oftener, their fault than ours. Bring that home to a man and you make him a better man! But it is difficult to bring anything home to them!'

She was evidently pleased with her phrase.

When she was saying good-bye she said:

'May I give you a kiss?'

'Yes—do.'

When the kiss was given, Nurse Jennings add

'I don't like to see you unhappy. If I had the chance I should like to bring it home to your husband.'

'What?'

'What he 's made you suffer.'

'No—no!' Dolores cried vehemently. 'Promise me—promise me on your honour you 'll never tell him what I 've told you to-night.'

And Nurse Jennings promised, sincerely intending to keep that compact.

When she had gone Dolores walked restlessly about the room for some minutes. Twice she stopped before the portrait of the old man and stood looking into his eyes. Then, as if coming to some mental decision, she sat down at her writing-table and quickly wrote the following note:

'Palazzo Barberini,
Wednesday night.

'I am so glad you are back in Rome. Come and see me to-morrow at five. It is terribly dull. I don't know what to do with myself to pass the time. I often——'

She paused and hesitated for some minutes. Then, frowning and compressing her lips, she wrote:

'long to be back on the lake.—D. C.'

She put this note into an envelope, and directed it to Cesare at the Palazzo Carelli.

CHAPTER XXIX

When he found that Dolores had left Villa D'Este in a fit of violent anger Cesare abandoned Bellagio and returned to his father's place near Monza. Donna Ursula was still there with his mother. He had known he would find her there. That was partly why he returned. In his anger sometimes Cesare showed a certain childishness, or boyishness, that almost quarrelled with his strong masculinity. He wanted to punish Dolores for what she had done. He felt sure that she had an instinctive dislike for little Donna Ursula. So he hurried back to Donna Ursula. When he recovered from his fit of temper he had greatly strengthened his mother's hopes. She wrote to Montebruno: 'Cesare seems much more inclined for the match now than he was at first. He went away to his uncle's villa at Bellagio, but hastened back. Evidently Ursula's loveliness and charm are making an impression. I begin to have great hopes of him.'

Montebruno passed the news on to Princess Mancelli.

Little Ursula, too, was well satisfied. She was incapable of any violent joy or violent grief. Her appearance of a doll was not wholly deceptive. But she was a doll with a will, and she had set her will to work upon Cesare Carelli. She intended to marry him. She knew he did not intend to marry her. That made no difference. He was a great match and that fact appealed to her cold little spirit. But she had another reason for wishing to marry him. His strong, dark, and very masculine appearance appealed to her. Although scarcely capable of love she was capable of desire. She desired Cesare as her husband, and she was accustomed to have her wishes gratified. From babyhood she had been spoilt by a foolish mother and a doting father. Not clever enough to judge relative values, but sharp enough to see what an extraordinary amount of deference and anxious desire great wealth produces in Italy, she thought herself a little personage of immense importance. The arbitrary look in her bright blue eyes was indicative of her temperament. As she wanted Cesare Carelli, it must come about that she would have him.

She was not in a great hurry. She was very young. There was no need to be in a fuss. But Cesare Carelli must learn what she wanted, and then learn that he was there upon the earth to give it to her. After his sudden return from the Villa Sirena, Donna Ursula began to think that his powers as a pupil were in course of development. This was all very right and proper. She was not elated, but she was not dissatisfied.

But when Cesare's fit of temper was over he began to hate more than ever the ice which was frame to take possession of his fire. The cool presence of Donna Ursula made him put a fresh value on Dolores. He had compared Dolores with Princess Maneglia and loved her for her softness. Now he compared her with Donna Ursula, and he adored her for her warmth. She was the midway perfect woman, feminine but surely passionate, delicate, evasive, but how full of latent promises!

And did not that flight which had at first so angered him, even that, hold out a promise?

For it surely implied fear of him! And the woman who is afraid is the woman who is impressed.

He emerged at last from his fit of anger, and all the masculine spirit in him told him that he must follow Dolores.

The whole of his strong nature was now fully roused. That evening under the trellis and on the *vaporino* had given the finishing-touch to his ardent passion. He had told his secret under the trellis. But in the little harbour of the villa on the point, when Dolores had looked at him by the light of the match, he had told her another secret. Often he thought of that last secret, and now he was glad he had told it. He did not believe in great reticence with a woman, and he knew he had cleared the ground. Now Dolores knew all there was to know. If she continued to be friends with him that would mean all that he wished. It must now be one thing or the other. The flight of Dolores might seem to indicate her intention of putting an end to their friendship; but when Cesare had emerged from his anger he often read the card she had sent him. And as he looked at the words he said to himself, 'After that night she wouldn't have sent it unless——' And the blood sang in his ears though his lips were smiling.

Without knowing it, led perhaps by his star, he came to Rome and called at Palazzo Barberini at the psychological moment. It was as if as he arrived before a door it swung softly open.

When he received the note of Dolores he was conscious of what seemed a strong shock in his heart, and his whole body responded to it. His nature leaped up. His youth felt as if it held within it immeasurable stores of conquering vigour. And he saw, like a stricken enemy at his feet, the man who had been a prey, who had crept along under the chains that a woman had hung about him. Now he was free indeed, free to win for himself the only thing he wanted. And that note which he held for so long in his hand, which he read again and again, told him surely that he must win it.

At five o'clock that day he rang the bell at the door of the Cannynges' apartment.

Carlino opened the door. Dolores was living with a very small establishment, and had no *maestro di casa* and no footman.

'Is the signora at home?' asked Cesare.

The boy gazed steadily with his anxious dark eyes.

'Are you Don Cesare Carelli?' he asked.

'Si.'

'The signora is at home.'

'Only to me! Only to me!' thought Cesare exultantly, as he laid down his hat and followed Carlino.

Instinctively he braced his muscles like a man feeling his strength, testing it, revelling in it.

Carlino suddenly looked round. Cesare said something kind and familiar to him, and Carlino began to smile.

'Don Cesare Carelli,' announced the boy at the door of the green and red drawing-room.

The awnings and blinds were drawn, and the big room was rather shadowy. Cesare saw Dolores a good way off. She was standing up, and at once he received from her an impression of decision. Even her tall figure looked decisive as she came to meet him. And when he saw her face just for a moment he was startled. It looked, he thought, strangely pale, and her eyes seemed to him intensely dark, shadowy, mysterious. This woman was not surely 'Gazelle.' There was nothing *espiègle* in this face. Her hand returned his grip with a sort of pressure that he thought odd from a woman. It was almost like the pressure some one might give, would probably give, when making a compact. And when she spoke Cesare thought that even her voice held some change in its tones.

'We two are all alone in Rome,' she said. 'Doesn't one don't you feel in this room as if we were all alone in a desert place?'

For an instant he did not reply, and in that instant he was aware of the completeness of the silence within the palace. It almost went to his head.

'But your husband!' he said. 'Isn't he in the desert?'

'No, he's still at Frascati. But he may possibly come in to-day. He comes over sometimes.'

She spoke in a careless voice. Cesare was silent. For a moment—he did not exactly know why—he felt almost ill at ease.

'How's the little boy?' he asked, as they sat down.

What had any little boy to do with them? He had had to cast about for a conversational opening. He was suddenly

angry with himself. He leaned forward, and before Dolores was able to answer he said:

'If your husband is going to stay on in Frascati I am going to remain here in Rome. There is no one here, no one whom we know at least. We could scarcely find a safer place for meeting in. Let me see you sometimes, and not here in the palace.'

He thought of Carlino.

'Yes. Why not?' said Dolores.

'Why did you rush away from Villa D'Este?'

He drew his chair nearer to hers. Something in her, this oddness of decision, perhaps, excited him strangely, almost terribly. But, after that scene in the little harbour by match-light, he meant to keep himself in control, so long at least as he knew, or believed, she wished it.

'I had such bad news from Frascati about little Theo.'

'That was why!' he exclaimed.

His exclamation was almost like a laugh.

'I thought I would go back. It was kinder.'

'To me?'

'It was a sudden impulse.'

'Do you yield always to your sudden impulses?'

'No. Remember I am not Italian.'

She was beginning obviously to manage the conversation, to turn it towards a lightness which at the moment he hated.

'Oh!' he exclaimed, and not lightly. 'Don't take the conventional view of the Italians. We are very much like other people.'

'But you are half English. You can't speak for the nation.'

'I only want to speak for myself.'

'Hush!' Dolores said, in a different voice. 'You did that under the trellis at Cadenabbia, once and for all. You let me into your life then.'

'Only into a part of my life. And you—you have never let me into your life.'

'No,' she said, almost sternly.

'I wish—may I draw up one of the blinds?' said Cesare. 'The sun is not very strong now. It is almost evening.'

'Yes. Shall we go for a walk?'

'Oh, but——'

He hesitated. He scarcely knew what he wished. Then he remembered her words about her husband.

'And if we miss your husband?' he asked.

'It does not matter.'

'Then let us go.'

He went to one of the windows and pulled up the blind. As he came back to Dolores she was standing before the Lenbach portrait, gazing fixedly at it. He came and stood beside her.

'You are very fond of that picture?' he asked.

'I admire it very much. What do you think of it?'

'I think that old man looks as if he had seen everything and knew everything.'

'The future too?' she asked, turning and looking at him.

'No one can know the future.'

'Wait a moment. I will put on my hat. I shall be very quick.'

She left him.

'She seems very careless about her husband!' Cesare thought.

He was still before the picture, and was still looking at it. But he no longer really saw it.

'Can he—can he ——?'

His mind was occupied with Theodore Cannynge, with the *ménage* at Frascati, and with the ways of faithless husbands. What had occurred at Frascati since the flight from Villa D'Este?

Dolores returned with her hat on and a parasol in her hand.

'Where are we going?' she asked.

And there was a new brightness, a new gaiety in her voice.

'Anywhere—the Villa Medici, the Borghese!'

'Let us go to the Villa Medici. I know a sculptor there.'

'Not there now?'

'Indeed he is. He has just come back from Valenciennes. He has the good taste to love Rome at this time—as we do.'

As they passed through the hall Dolores said to Carlino:

'I don't think the signore will come, Carlino, but if he does tell him I've gone out for a stroll, and may not be back for an hour.'

'Or two!' Cesare said in English to her.

'Or two, Carlino.'

They went out. And again Cesare wondered about her husband.

'Why should we go to see your sculptor?' he said, as they descended the hill towards the Piazza Barberini.

'I like him. And it is an excuse to go and wander about that delicious garden.'

'Now I understand!'

He spoke energetically, almost joyously.

'No, but I really like to see the sculptor too,' she said.

'I don't think I understand you to-day.'

'Don't you? Did you at——?'

She stopped speaking. But he did not let the subject go.

'Did I at Cadenabbia, you mean! Yes, that night I think I did. And you understood me—I don't mean at Cadenabbia—too well.'

She said nothing. They crossed the piazza and came into the Via Sistina. Few people were about. Two or three sleepy looking men yawned in the doorways of the deserted antiquity shops, and a veteran, in a long white blouse, snored among a white assemblage of small plaster statuettes, with his head against the pedestal of the listening Mercury.

'You see it is the desert!' he said.

'Yes. We shall certainly not meet any one we both know.'

They walked on in silence till they came to the obelisk that stands between the top of the Spanish steps and the church of the Sacré Cœur. A man was leaning on the stone balustrade looking out over Rome. They could only see his back, broad, with rather square shoulders, a head covered with thick hair, and crowned with a soft old brown hat. But just as they came up to him he turned slowly round and showed Dolores the face of Pacci. She was startled. With his honest blue eyes he looked steadily into her face and into the face of Cesare. Then, without any salutation, he resumed his former position and stared steadily out over Rome.

'Do—don't you think he knew us?' said Dolores, as they went on towards the ilexes and the mossy fountain before the Academy of France.

'I'm quite sure he didn't. Pacci is such a strange

fellow. He may have been dreaming and seen us as if in his dream.'

'But seen us

'Why not ?'

'Of course. Why not ?' Dolores echoed.

She nodded and smiled at the man in livery, holding a staff, who opened the gate to let them into the villa.

'Monsieur Leroux travaille aujourd'hui ?' she asked.

'Oui, madame !'

The gate shut behind them.

'Let us go to the studio at once,' said D[illegible], [illegible] had ascended in silence the little hill which leads up to the big and almost wild-looking garden.

'But why ? Why need we go there at all ? There is nobody there.'

'I really want to go to the studio.'

'If we do go he is sure to come with us everywhere.'

'You don't know him. He is a worker.'

'I am in your hands,' said Cesare.

He drew a little nearer to her.

'I am in your hands.'

'It is the last studio but one.'

In the deep shade of the great trees they turned down the path to the left, and presently came to a door on which was written in chalk the word 'Leroux.' Near this name was scrawled the following legend: 'La petite s'est amenée aujourd'hui à 6½ et n'a trouvé personne,' evidently by a model.

'Am I to knock ?' asked Cesare reluctantly.

The silence, the solitude were so delicious to him, so tempted him, so wooed him to the truth, that he hated to summon a stranger from out of them.

'Please do,' said Dolores.

And again he noticed an odd decision in her voice and manner. He struck on the wooden door with his stick. There was no reply.

'He isn't here,' he said.

'Please try again, a little louder.'

He knocked again almost violently. This time he heard steps. The door was opened, and a small, good-looking man, with gentle dark eyes and a black beard, stood before

them. He wore a long sculptor's blouse, and was smoking a pipe, and his hands were partially covered with clay. When he saw Dolores he bowed and smiled.

'A friend of mine, Don Cesare Carelli,' she said. 'Monsieur Leroux.'

The sculptor bowed again and begged Cesare to enter.

'But, *madame*, you must wait for a moment, please!' he said.

'Go on, Don Cesare,' she said.

As he went in Cesare saw a naked model coming away from the couch on a platform where he had been posing as a dying man in agony. He was from the mountain village of Anticoli, and had the piercing eyes of a wild animal.

As he went by Cesare into a room to the left of the studio to put on some clothes, he stared at him, as an animal might look at the night around it in a forest. A moment afterwards the sculptor let in Dolores.

He was at work on a large statue of a nude man lying in a twisted attitude on a bed, with an expression of concentrated mental anguish but also of acute physical pain on his face. In one hand, which looked flaccid, and as if life were dying out of it, was a bottle, scarcely retained by the large nerveless fingers. By the feet and hands of the man, and by something in the contour of his face, and the arrangement of his disordered hair, his low position in the scale of humanity was made manifest to the spectator. Nevertheless he was handsome, and in his grief and pain there was something of dignity, something even of pride, as if the soul held a virtue which perhaps the body was expiating. A strong modern realism was impressed on the whole work.

Dolores, Cesare, and the sculptor stood before it, and almost immediately the model, in a pair of thin trousers and a jacket turned up to the chin, entered silently on bare feet, sat down in a corner, and gazed at them with his fierce eyes full of remoteness. Cesare asked for an explanation of the subject, and the sculptor, speaking in French, with a very gentle voice, said:

'It was suggested to me by a paragraph I once read in the *Petit Journal*. A man of notoriously evil character, a wrestler at country fairs, had a mistress to whom he was passionately attached. One night he came back from a

visit to a village at some distance from his home and found that his mistress had deserted him for his own brother. He took poison and died. He was found unclothed as he is there. I have tried to show in his face, even in his whole body, that he has within him, in spite of his low origin, his brutal nature, his pain, and his abject despair, the thing that can never be wholly undignified.'

'What is that?' said Cesare.

'But, monsieur—love.'

'You think love cannot be undignified!' said Cesare, wheeling round and gazing at the little man in the long blouse.

'Not wholly undignified,' turned the sculptor, with mild firmness. 'However much a flame may flicker it never loses the fierce glory of fire.'

On the last words his voice became suddenly sonorous.

'I like that idea,' said Dolores, 'and I think you have shown it.'

They talked together for some time. Always the model remained in his corner, never removing his eyes from them except once, for a moment, when he swiftly rolled and lit a cigarette. The studio, in which there was not a trace of luxury or of comfort, but in which there was the home-like and familiar look of work well loved by the worker, was cool. The whiteness of plaster and marble was soothing. And the great deserted garden outside seemed to exhale an atmosphere of peace, and even of romance, which penetrated to this bare and spacious chamber and made it almost a sanctuary.

'What would I give to be a worker!' said Dolores at last, looking round her slowly. 'To lose oneself in work! What a comfort, what a blessing that must be.'

She got up.

'I'm afraid to stay any longer here. It makes me too envious,' she said.

'I pity all those who do not work,' said the sculptor very simply.

'As hundreds of misguided people pity all those who do,' said Dolores, going towards the door.

She nodded to the model, who put up one bony hand to his jacket, held it under his chin, then got up, and bowed with a curious alertness.

'He looks as if he could make a spring like a panther,' said Dolores. 'Good-bye, Monsieur Leroux. How I envy you!'

'She gazed out over the garden, which from here, looked almost like a forest glade with its great trees, its tangle of tall grass and rank growth of herbage.

'Who could think we were in Rome?'

The sculptor looked at her, with his quiet, almost tender smile.

'I dine out here in the garden at night. I am the only pensionnaire. The director, my comrades, all are far away. Would——' he hesitated, then added, 'would not you, madame, and your friend, dine with me to-night? I will have the table put there in the midst of the high grass. It will be like dining in the depths of a jungle when the darkness has come. The food will be very simple—very simple!'

He glanced from Dolores to Cesare, and he saw that the pretty, tall woman whom he so much admired was hesitating; with her eyes fixed on the face of the handsome Italian whom he had never seen before.

'Thank you, monsieur. We will come. It will be a fête for us,' she answered, at last.

But there was an odd something, that was akin to a dryness in her voice as she spoke.

'At half-past eight, when the darkness is falling, madame.'

And Dolores echoed:

'At half-past eight when the darkness is falling.'

When the sculptor shut his door Dolores said to Cesare:

'I will meet you under the obelisk at twenty minutes past eight.'

'But you aren't going now!'

'Yes.'

'But let us stay here till dinner-time. Where else could we——'

'I must go home now. I wish to see if my husband has come from Frascati.'

'Why?' said Cesare, with an almost brutal intonation.

'At twenty minutes past eight!' Dolores replied.

And without another word she left him.

He watched her going down the path in the flickering light and shade. But he did not follow her. She was rous-

ing the brutality in him by the way she was treating him. Yet he only loved and desired her the more. He did not understand her. The fact that she had sent for him after what had occurred on Lake Como, made him feel certain that she not only wanted his love, but that she meant to accept it.

Nevertheless there was something in her demeanour that puzzled him and made him vaguely uneasy, something elusive, at moments almost repellent. She seemed now ready to defy public opinion, and careless of her husband. Yet she had hurried home to see if he was in the palace. Why? Cesare longed to know what had recently happened at Frascati. He felt as if an immense change had occurred in the life of Dolores since he had seen her on the lake. Perhaps—though it seemed almost impossible—she had not understood the relations existing between her husband and Mrs. Denzil, and had just discovered their nature. Perhaps—could some arrangement have been come to between husband and wife in regard to their married life?

Cesare felt that his passion grew in uncertainty.

At eight o'clock he was at the top of the Spanish steps. While he waited he paced up and down rather quickly. He remembered how he had contemplated, had been forced to contemplate the misery, even the angry torture of Lisetta, how he had felt a sort of contempt for it, as a healthy man often feels—in opposition to his reasoning faculty—when he looks at a man stricken with an ugly disease.

Now he began to have a creeping comprehension of such mental and physical torment as he had obliged Lisetta to undergo. If such a fate as hers should be reserved for him!

As this thought flashed through his mind it seemed to him as if all the forces of his nature leaped up to repel it.

And just then he saw Dolores coming from the Via Sistina. She stopped at the street corner by the house sometimes called 'the tempietto,' and gave some money to a robust and cheerful one-legged man. Then she came on slowly. Cesare went to meet her.

'I have been here a long time,' he said.

'Have you? But am I late?'

'Did you——?' Cesare hesitated. He did not want to ask a direct question. But something irresistible compelled

him to do so. 'Did you find your husband at the palace?' he said.

'No.'

He was going to say something—he scarcely knew what—when Dolores exclaimed in a lively voice.

'You don't know how I am looking forward to our evening. I feel like a child out of school. One gets so sick of always doing the same things. Every dinner in our society is like every other dinner. One gets accustomed to the monotony, of course, and scarcely notices it until one escapes from it. To-night we have escaped. Are you glad?' His eyes were fastened on her face.

'And this is only the beginning,' he said, not answering her question, except with his eyes.

'How—the beginning?'

'The beginning of your escape. You must go further. You must distance every pursuer.'

'There are no pursuers. There will be no pursuers.'

Again he thought of her husband. If she would only tell him something! There was an air almost of recklessness about her this evening.

'How do you know that?'

'What does it matter if there are? But we are both talking great nonsence. Bon soir! Nous voilà encore une fois!'

The porter smiled deferentially. Again he let them into the garden, which now looked mysterious as it gave itself to the warm darkness of the night, mysterious, solitary and immense. For its confines were no longer easily visible as in the light of day. Fireflies were beginning to dance their rounds. Their sparks came from the shadows like tiny musical notes out of stillness. The masses of leaves that clothed the great trees were silent and motionless. The walks were deserted. A studio in the centre of the garden, standing alone, showed no light.

And the director and the pensionnaires were far away, in mountain valleys, perhaps, by sandy places, or by the banks of those long rivers of France to which the poplars are faithful. How they were far away to-night!

'There is a light! Look!' said Dolores.

They stood still on the gravel and looked through the

trees to the left. There, in the midst of the tall, rank grass, was a round yellow gleam, and by it a dark object which moved and bent and rose up and disappeared.

'Our dinner-table!' said Dolores. 'Monsieur Leroux!'

She sent her voice through the trees melodiously.

And suddenly Cesare, in the calm and unembarrassed way of Italians, let loose a loud tenor voice in 'La donna è mobile,' throwing, apparently, his whole nature into the light-hearted song, and making a noise so powerful as to be almost astonishing.

'But what a voice you have!' said Dolores, when he stopped.

'Why not?' said Cesare.

'And you never told me you sang.'

'I hardly ever do. But to-night—well, this is not like other nights.'

He took her hand in the shadows.

'We sing when there is something to make us sing.'

Dolores drew away her hand, but gently.

'And you chose the "donna è mobile,"' she said. 'Why was that?'

'I did not know at the moment. But no doubt I was thinking of you.'

'You think me variable?'

'At Cadenabbia you did not take away your hand. Why do you take it away to-night? When I came to the palace to-day you wished to come here. When we were here you would not stay. You hurried back to the palace. Now——'

'I am not rushing away now.'

'No. But how can I tell what you will do?'

'Often we do not know ourselves what we shall do.'

'But there are people who can make others do as they wish.'

His voice had changed.

'Do you think you are one of them?' asked Dolores.

'Love gives some people strange powers,' said Cesare.

'And from others it takes away the powers they possess.'

'Powers of resistance, perhaps. Is that what you mean?'

She did not answer.

'Tell me—when you sent me that note yesterday what did you mean?'

'Monsieur Leroux!'

Dolores sent her voice again into the darkness

'Allo!'

'Here he is!'

Their host, who had put on a dark grey suit and a large and loose black tie, came to meet them, beaming with a pleasure and cordiality that seemed very simple, led them at once into what he called the 'jungle,' and installed them at the small dinner-table, which was closely surrounded by grass that grew over two feet high. The servant, a big and dark Italian, immediately placed before them a bowl of smoking vegetable soup, and poured red wine into their glasses. Dolores was not hungry. She would rather not have eaten at all. But she concealed her lack of appetite for fear of hurting her host's feelings. He was deeply and openly interested in the food: minutely described to his guests what they might expect, and when it came took care to draw them into an ample discussion of its merits or demerits.

'This needed an onion to make it savoury,' he would say, and the talk would turn upon onions; or 'they do not understand the use of the cabbage in Italy,' and for some minutes cabbages would be the theme of their discourse. And always the fireflies danced their rounds above the delicate heads of the grasses, and the darkness seemed to draw closer above and around the globe of light that illumined the faces of Dolores and the two men.

She took her share in the talk for a while, but presently Monsieur Leroux and Cesare fell into a discussion from which, quite naturally, she was able to detach herself. She listened at first, now and then putting in a word. And she noticed how easily her two companions had slipped into acquaintanceship. They belonged to different worlds, they had led lives almost extraordinarily different. Yet a sort of freemasonry, the freemasonry of sex, now drew them together. Already they surely understood each other, as Cesare would never understand her, as even Theo, after all these years, did not understand her, and as, at this moment, she wished no woman to understand her.

There was no moon. The night, though clear and starry, was dark. Dinner was over. The servant had gone away

with the plates and the dishes, leaving only some fruit and wine on the table. Cesare was offering the sculptor a big cigar.

Dolores heard them discussing cigars. Both of them spoke with an animation that seemed to her strong and unforced. Cesare's eyes were often upon her. She believed that he was deliberately leaving her in her silence. Did he think, could he think, it would operate in his favour? What did he think, what must he think after her note to him? It seemed to her that as he talked his voice grew stronger, firmer, his manner more animated. In the narrow circle of lamplight his gestures were often only half revealed. She saw his muscular brown hand, with the glow upon it, looking unusually alive, then shadowy, strange, as a movement took it out into the darkness. But the light always shone in his eyes. To-night she was conscious of his youth, his strength and the glory of it, as she had been when he came up from the lake. She looked at the darkness of the night, the stars, the towering forms of the black trees, the soft and mysterious dusklness of the vegetation in whose bosom they were sunk as in a sea; at the fireflies full of an animation that was magical, and that seemed remote from all earthly activities, and she could scarcely believe she was in Rome, only a few minutes' walk from the palace in which she had suffered so much, in which she was destined, perhaps, to suffer so much more. And with a stronger force than she had ever felt before fatalism seemed to sweep through her like a dark and tidal wave. The night above her and about her was like a decree. The stars were despotic, no longer gentle in their distant wonder and beauty. A breathing of wild rose from this ancient garden that was like a glade in some forest remote and virgin. She felt as if forces were laying their hands upon her, were taking her—whither she would, or would not? She did not even know. And she felt that Cesare also was dominated by these forces, though he did not know it, as she did, because his temperament and his nature, and his intellect were different from hers. She drew her chair softly a little away from the table and back into the darkness.

What were they talking of? Vaguely she heard names—Raphael, Bellini, Michael Angelo. The sculptor, warmed by

the generous wine, was becoming expansive. He spoke of the transition when artists, no longer satisfied with the effect that they could produce with marble, and seeking to express religious emotion, became painters of Madonnas, saints, angels and Il Bambino. What would Cesare think of all that? But he seemed interested, even intent. When she saw his eyes turned upon her, however, she knew well that he did not care what was said. He was with her in the night. He was going away presently alone with her. And for him that was enough. Leroux spoke of Leonardo da Vinci, of his many talents, and of his love for music, and Dolores found herself listening with a greater intentness, she did not know why. He mentioned the name of Lorenzo de Medici, and quoted, in French, Lorenzo's romance:

> 'Oh! que la jeunesse est belle
> Et éphémère! Chante et ris
> Et sois heureux si tu le veux
> Et ne compte pas sur demain!'

'One of our pensionnaires has set it to music,' he said. 'It was done at our concert last May.'

'But it is better in my Italian,' said Cesare. 'Now listen, and tell me if it is not.'

He leaned forward a little to Dolores and the darkness, and, in his firm, clear voice, and carefully giving all the music of the words, he repeated:

> 'Quant' è bella giovinezza,
> Che si fugge tuttavia
> Chi vuol esser lieto, sia
> Di doman non c'è certezza.'

'I like it very much in my language,' said the sculptor, who had already been in Rome two years but could not speak six consecutive words of correct Italian.

'And you?' asked Cesare of Dolores.

'And you?' he said again in a moment, for she had not answered.

She had drawn her chair so far back into the darkness that he could not see her face distinctly, but he saw her put her hand up to it quickly. Then she said:

'I think it incomparably more charming in Italian.'

She paused, and then added to Leroux:

'You know how I delight in French, but this seems to me much more musical, and much more real in Italian.'

'I will sing it to you,' said Cesare. 'There is a setting of it by some Italian, I forget whom.'

And he lifted up his powerful voice of a strong and young man, and sang the Italian words:

'Quant'è bella giovinezza
Che se fugge tuttavia
Chi vuol esser lieto, sia
Di domani non c'è certezza.'

And to Dolores, while she listened, it seemed that in the voice of Cesare at that moment there was something imperative which was linked with the despotic will of the night. She felt as if he was dominated, but as if he was also an instrument of domination. He had been chosen by forces he did not understand to execute a decree of which he knew nothing. He sang the verse twice, and the second time with much more emotion. Evidently the true meaning of the little song had gained upon him as he sang. Ah! how beautiful—how beautiful is youth! Dolores forgot it was Cesare who sang. Already the tears had come into her eyes when Cesare repeated the words. Now they came again. She was thirty. Her youth was slipping away—for alas! she was a woman. And the morrow was uncertain. She might live to be old. But she might have only a short time to live, perhaps a very short time. She felt that her hands were slightly trembling as they rested clasped on her knees. If she were to die in unhappiness, misunderstood, sterile! If she were to die and if her death were not to be regretted! If she were to die and to leave no gift behind her, no gift to recall her each day to the memory of one she loved, no gift to awaken each day gratitude in a heart that once had certainly loved her! If she were to die and only to be remembered, if she were remembered at all, as a poor little failure!

'Chi vuol esser lieto, sia
Di domani non c'è certezza.'

Her heart changed. It was as if into it there burst a new inmate. And when Cesare stopped singing, she said:

'What a fool the man or woman is who avoids happiness

from the fears or the scruples connected with to-morrow! Don't you think so, Monsieur Leroux?'

'I do indeed,' returned the sculptor, in his soft voice. 'But since I was a very young student in Paris I have lived for the day always.'

'I don't know—but I don't believe I have ever lived for the day,' said Dolores.

'You must learn to,' said Cesare. 'You could learn to. One may be dead to-morrow. *Chi lo sa?*'

And again the terror of death came upon Dolores.

CHAPTER XXX

It was late when Dolores got up to go. Again and again she had thought, 'It is time. I must go.' Again and again she had looked into Cesare's face and she had postponed the moment of departure. The distant chime of a clock sounding eleven brought her at last to decision.

'I must leave our jungle,' she said.

She looked round, searching the darkness. She brushed her fingers lightly over the heads of the tall grasses.

'I cannot believe it is in the midst of Rome,' she added, in a low voice, and as if speaking to herself.

'If only it were not!' said Cesare. 'If only it were really the jungle!'

Dolores turned, just in time to see Cesare glance at the sculptor with a meaning that was unmistakable. By a word she might have nullified its effect. She knew that, and just for a moment she thought of speaking the word. But the new inmate in her heart told her to keep silence.

'*Chi vuol esser lieto, sia: di domen no c'è certezza!*' she thought.

And then she thought of her husband at Frascati. Probably at this moment he was sitting in the red loggia with Edna Denzil.

'I wish it were,' he said. 'I wish it were really far away, out in the wilds.'

Monsieur Leroux shrugged his small shoulders.

'I like to pretend that it is while I am dining, but to know in my heart that my studio is within a few yards. I am very poor-spirited,' he said.

His mild eyes were smiling, but Dolores thought she detected in their smile a trace of irony. She held out her hand.

'Thank you for your *festa*. This has been the most characteristic evening I have ever spent in Rome. One forgets so many evenings. But yours I shall never forget.'

Again she brushed her fingers over the tall grasses as if in farewell.

'Thank you, madame. Good-bye.'

The two men exchanged a warm hand grip. Cesare spoke some words of thanks with a strong sincerity that evidently delighted his host, even though Leroux's acute intelligence was fully awake to the fact that the Italian's gratitude was not merely aroused by a dinner.

They left him standing in the midst of the grasses with his hand on the lamp, and as they walked slowly away up the dark path that lurks the high wall of the garden beyond the studios they saw the yellow light travel away to the left and disappear. Then they heard a door shut decisively.

Cesare stood still. He drew a deep breath and looked at Dolores. She had stopped beside him, almost mechanically. Both of them had perhaps been arrested in their slow progress through the dark by that sound, which was like a last word sent after them in the night by the sculptor.

'Did you hear how he shut that door?' said Cesare. 'I am sure he is going to spend the night in the studio.'

'But——'

'There is an inner room where the model went to dress. I don't think you saw it. Probably there's a sofa there, something that he can sleep on. He has made us free of the garden.'

'The man at the gate must be waiting for us.'

'Let him wait. Which way shall we go?'

Dolores walked on, and took the path to the right, but she went slowly. Cesare could not see her face clearly now, and perhaps she knew it, and felt herself safe from observation. For her face was set and almost rigid, and in her

forehead there were two deep lines. The gentleness, the wistfulness characteristic of her had disappeared. There rose to the surface the fierceness that lies, perhaps far down, in every creature that knows how to love and to suffer.

In silence they came to the solitary studio, that was like a little house in the midst of a wood. Here Cesare stopped. He caught the hand of Dolores.

'You are not going home yet. I shall not let you go yet,' he said.

His words came to her through a deep breathing, and his hand was hot and hard upon hers.

'You are not to play with me,' he said. 'I am not going to allow that. You wrote to me. You asked me to come to you, after that night on the lake. You wrote that often you longed to be back on the lake. I have got the letter. I shall always keep it. You knew, when you wrote it, what it meant, the only meaning it could bear to me after what happened at Como. You are not one of the women who think they can treat badly any man just because he loves them. Those are mean women with hateful natures—*camilles—camilles*. You are not like that. Love—love like mine cannot be treated so by a woman like you. That is impossible. And you know that as well as I do.'

All the time he was speaking his hand was opening and closing sharply on hers. His own words made him excited, sent through him a heat that was almost of anger. And this anger roused within him all the arrogance that was part of the new manhood which had caused him to break with Princess Manelli.

'You think,' he said, and now he closed his hand and pressed hers till she felt pain, 'that I will allow myself to be played with by any woman however much I love her. I know there is a sort of love which will sink to my humiliation, will endure anything—as a dog will from its master. I despise such love. I hate such love. I will never show it. No, I have not made myself free for that! No, no!'

'And I?' she thought. 'Shall I humiliate myself because of my love? Shall I creep to the feet of my husband to beg, to fawn for his love?'

And her heart echoed Cesare's last almost bitter exclamation.

'Come,' he exclaimed.

In front of the little house was a stone bench, with a high wooden fence behind it. At each end of the bench, on a stone pedestal, an antique bust coldly regarded the night. From above a gigantic ilex tree sent down a protective darkness. Cesare drew Dolores to this seat with an imperative force that was almost brutal. And when he did so it seemed to her as if the obscurity closed around them like shutting doors, and as if the silence in the great garden became more intense, heavier, like silence in a secret place whither no one could ever penetrate. Rome seemed to withdraw to an immense distance. She no longer had any sensation of being in Rome.

'I told you something of my life,' Cesare said, pressing her hand down against his knee. 'I told you what I have suffered. To break away I had to conquer many things, even what some here in Rome would call perhaps my sense of honour. Ah! but how false all that tradition is! There was really no honour in the question. I had to be free. Every man has rights. I took mine at last. But I did not take them for nothing. I did not take them because I wanted to go into a new misery. Don't you see, can't you feel how a man is, must be, after such a lesson as I have had, such a thing as I have done? But can't you—can't you see?'

'Yes,' Dolores said, in a very low voice.

'I've been unhappy, indeed I'm unhappy in love,' he continued rapidly. 'I want to be happy in love. And you—you want to be happy. It's the only thing in which there is real happiness for us who are young, who can feel. I have no one but you.'

'You have Donna Ursula!' said Dolores.

She did not know why he said it. The words checked Cesare's outburst as a douche of cold water checks a rising flame. There was a silence. Then he said:

'That is true. And you have your husband!'

In the second silence something moved in the tree above them.

'What's that?' said Dolores.

The leap of her nerves showed her her bodily condition. For an instant she had thrilled with fear. In that instant brusquely she had moved nearer to Cesare.

'A bird,' he answered, putting one arm behind her.

'Of course.'

She tried to laugh.

'We shall wake all the garden up,' she added. 'We ought to go.' But something in the touch of his arm made her wish to stay. For it told her that here she was wanted, she was loved, and, strangely, mysteriously, but powerfully, it told her something else. In the darkness she seemed to see the eyes of Lenbach's old man regarding her steadily.

'Would you give my life into the hands of Donna Ursula?' Cesare said.

His voice was lower.

'If you would you are more cruel than I. For I only want to take you away from some one who does not love you.'

'Hush!' she whispered sharply.

'Who does not love you,' he repeated inflexibly. 'Who does not know how to love you.'

Suddenly his arm closed firmly about her, with an almost hard fierceness, he leaned down and kissed her, and kept his lips pressed on hers.

'That is how I love you, that is how I love you.'

Dolores sat very still. She made no response. She suffered his kiss. It told her much, far more than any words could have told her, however true, and spoken with however great a sincerity. And as she sat quite still, almost like one petrified, she was asking herself again and again:

'Shall I accept it? Shall I take it? Shall I use it?'

The remote soul of her was speaking, and she hated its voice, almost as one honourable must hate a treachery. But it was ungovernable. And Cesare took away his lips and kissed her again.

'I knew I should make you love me at last! I knew I should make you love me!'

There was in his voice a sound of triumph that was without offence, because it was wholly natural, manly, and strong.

'All that I did I did for you, long before you cared in the least for me. Did you even know, did you suspect then—all that time ago—why I needed to be free? I don't believe you did. I knew I should have to wait. I was ready to wait. I—I've been patient!'

Dolores drew away from his arm. Her sense of treachery was increasing as Cesare's sincerity became more apparent to her, as he opened his heart simply, without self-consciousness or fear. She knew that he believed in the woman she essentially was, and that he did not understand, or suspect, the woman she had become. But had she even yet become that woman? Now she began to struggle against the inexorable change in herself, she began to try to be what Cesare thought that she was.

'I didn't—I haven't said I cared for you. I have never said it,' she murmured.

Again something moved in the tree above them. There was a prolonged rustle. The tiny dark shadow of a bird in flight passed between them and the stars. Very far off a bell chimed in some distant place below them.

'You needn't say it. After what I was, what I did that night on Como, you wrote and asked me to come to you. You came here with me to-night. That is enough. If you were another woman, any other woman—' he broke off. 'That is enough!' he said again.

This triumph that flowed out of faith almost horrified Dolores.

'Don't believe in me!' she said.

But against her will, her voice pleaded for belief. Too much she wanted to rest on something. She had not the courage to throw away such a great gift, to fall back into the void of her life. And yet she had not as yet the other courage to be determined and ruthless in evil, to take what was offered to her with wilfulness so that she might have something. Perhaps she would have summoned up the first courage but for the thought that had gnawed at her mind so long, and that had received a new and a terrible strength from the touch of Cesare's arm, of his lips. She dared neither to go into the room, nor dared she to shut the door and remain outside.

And she got up from the wooden bench slowly and trembling.

'Don't go! You mustn't go!'

Cesare sat still and seized her hand, with the gesture surely of a master. To-night for the first time she realised completely what she had let loose in him. Long ago

she had mysteriously known that he might have an influence on her life. But she had not known what an influence she might have upon his. Perhaps her ignorance had been owing to the fact that she had not cared to know.

'Why should you go?'

If she could have given him the true reason!

'Let us walk a little. I don't know—that bird moving about has made me feel restless. I can't sit still here in the dark.'

He got up.

'Were you really startled?'

'Yes.'

'Frightened, with me beside you!'

'I believe I was.'

'How strange women are!' he said, almost with a boyishness.

Instinctively she had found just the words to check his passion without seeming deliberately to repress it. She had made him feel protective, had put herself almost in the place of a child.

'If I could be always beside you! If I could always protect you!' he said, adoring her softness, and thinking of Lisetta Manelli.

Almost savagely the understanding of their fate, of true liberty rushed upon him. The moment was deceitful, had tricked him. Rome lay around them. How soon would come the light when all eyes would open, when the staring city would be revealed. He had a violent longing to take Dolores away and make her his, and keep her his. Secrecy was hateful to this love of his, and instinct told him that the immense difference between Dolores and Princess Manelli would make a situation in the heart of hypocrisy such as his for long years with Lisetta—impossible with Dolores. There was something too sensitive in her to endure that.

'If I could take you away!' he added, almost in a tone of despair.

And again Dolores was almost horrified by the simplicity with which he assumed from her recent actions that her love was akin to his. She walked towards the great open space,

the more formal garden, that stretches away from the arcade of the Academy of France.

'Don't let us talk or think of impossibilities!' she said.

'Where are you going?'

'I don't know. I want to get away from the trees for a moment.'

'But why? And we may meet Leroux.'

'You said you were sure he was going to sleep in the studio.'

'He may not. He may change his mind. If he does he must come this way to go to his room in the palace.'

'What does it matter if we meet him? He knows we are walking about in the garden.'

'How can he know?'

After a slight pause Dolores said:

'I saw you look at him just before you said good-bye to him.'

He thought there was resentment in her voice, and he felt as if suddenly she were trying to elude him. Yet she remained in the garden with him at this hour. She did not turn towards the gate. The Italian in him told him that her conduct must mean one thing and one alone, and that he was a fool, and less than a man, not to act brutally upon his knowledge. But the Englishman in him whispered something else. And the clash of the two voices sent doubt and confusion through him.

'It is true. I did. I was afraid he might think it his duty to accompany you to the gates. And I could not stand that. I had to seize the opportunity. I have waited so long. I have given up so much.'

'What?'

'For a long while I have lived as none of my friends live in Rome,' he said, in a low, but firm voice.

Dolores was sharply conscious of a certain brutality in Cesare's nature, which grated on her sensitiveness, the delicacy of the good woman in her, but which gave more force to, and as it were proved just, the conviction which was now for ever with her. She thought of Nurse Jennings. In that moment she linked Cesare and the nurse together in her mind. They stood together for certain

things, unabashed, almost terribly frank, clothed in naturalness.

'Perhaps you cannot realise what it has cost me,' he said. 'For years it is true that I was like a man in prison. But at least I was not alone there. And I was loved there, too much loved, persecuted by love. Ever since then, since I broke away, I've lived as men of my age don't live and I've been lonely—lonely.'

He paused. Then he repeated, with evidently growing excitement, and an accent that was almost savage:

'I've been lonely. You've made me lose, waste, throw away like a lot of rubbish months of my youth. We can't get anything back once it's gone. But—and it's the only thing we can do—we can live doubly to make up. Dolores, you owe me reparation.'

His voice was almost choked.

'You owe me reparation!' he repeated. 'No! Don't let us go out there!'

'Yes, yes!'

He seized her hand, held her where they were under the trees. By his touch she knew the anger that was boiling within him, a sort of rage of Italian youth and strength determined to wipe out that sterile past of which he was perhaps even secretly ashamed. All the smiles of his gay companions were with him now in the night. All their joys of the flesh, and of the spirit gained through the flesh clamoured about him. He looked on the lost months lying, like withered leaves, at his feet. And something that was almost like fury seized him. It was perhaps mainly physical. It was perhaps the revenge of nature upon him.

'Only you can make up to me for all I have lost. Are you going to make up to me?'

In his voice there was a sound that was almost threatening. By that sound, by the rage that was sweeping him beyond all conventionalities, that was stripping him to the natural man, Dolores was able, was forced, to understand what she was in his life. With an almost frightful swiftness she compared herself in relation to Cesare with herself in relation to her husband: the woman wanted, angrily, even with rage, desired, the woman unwanted, neglected, put gently, persistently aside, very often perhaps forgotten. And she

had no anger for Cesare. But she had some fear. Till now she had not fully realised what Cesare was. And she feared her own lovelessness. Her honesty awoke, was cruel, fighting with longings she would not avow. And his hot recklessness woke in her something responsive, that was not love but that was connected with love; a desire to be happy for a moment at all costs, to forget for a moment at all costs, to lose herself in the storm, to let love beat upon her with all his winds and his lashing rains, play about her with all his lightnings, fill her ears with his thunders unrestricted.

In that moment she knew why good women sometimes yield, and are condemned. She felt as if, by a searchlight, she saw down to the bottom of human nature.

Acting wholly on impulse she drew her hand violently from Cesare's. But directly she was free she came nearer to him, she put both her hands on his shoulders, and looked into his face.

'Cesare,' she said. 'I understand. I understand all. But you've been too honest with me, I think.'

She shivered a little.

'Too honest?' he said.

He stood perfectly still, almost like a boy, looking into her face.

'Yes, yes.'

'Why?'

'I'm not worth it.'

'Zitto!' he exclaimed.

And he moved. But she pressed her hands down on his shoulders. And he remembered the strange grip of her hand when he had come into the twilight of the great room in Palazzo Barberini. Some force that he did not understand was hidden in her softness.

'No, no, I'm not worth it. I oughtn't to have asked you to come. I oughtn't to have written that I longed to be back on the lake.'

He looked straight into her eyes and said:

'*Chi vuol esser lieto, sia: Di doman no c'è certezza!* You are thinking of to-morrow, I can see it in your eyes. And yet you said only to-night that the man or woman who avoids happiness from the fears or the scruples connected with to-morrow is a fool.'

'Yes, but—if I am thinking of to-morrow not for myself but for you!'

A strange look had come into her eyes, a look of troubled sincerity that went right into his heart. He caught her face between his hands.

'O Dolores!' he whispered. 'How I want you! How I want you!'

And suddenly tears rushed into his eyes, tears born out of fire.

'How I want you—want you! Do you feel it? Do you feel it?'

His hands on her cheeks were burning. She felt a strange sensation, as if Cesare were everything and she were nothing.

'You have blotted out everybody, everything,' he went on, always whispering, and with the tears still shining in his eyes. 'How is it? How can it be? How can such power be? Everything gone—out—you! It's terrible. But I won't be your slave—never! Don't think it. I've learnt, I've suffered. I'm a man now, the real thing. I'd rather kill myself and have done with it than be under even your feet. What are we going to do? What are we going to do? Now you see how it is! But you always knew!'

'No!' she breathed.

'You knew! You knew! Such a thing can't be hidden. And I always meant you to know.'

'Not till to-night—not really!'

'And—' the whispering voice nearly died away. 'Even to-night not really—yet.'

She took her hands from his shoulders, put them on his hands, and released her face. The serious woman who had said, 'You've been too honest with me,' was gone. The intensity of his emotion, the bravery—so it seemed to her—with which he showed it, caught away brain and heart from watchfulness, from quietude. That feeling of Cesare being everything, herself nothing, increased upon her. But she was still able to be conscious that it was dangerous.

As she stood free of Cesare she was aware of a soft noise in the warm and scented night. It came from the fountain that plays in the open space before the Academy of France. Again a bell chimed in the distance below. It was answered by other bells. Rome was there, speaking in the night,

calling from tower to tower, while fountain whispered to fountain through all the gracious city. These sounds suddenly—she did not know why—brought her husband before Dolores, not as an accusing, but as an indifferent figure, intent on something which had killed in him the observant faculty. He seemed to be standing close to her and to be gone.

She shuddered and went out from the trees before Cesare could prevent her. He followed her, almost with a spring.

'It's true! It's true!' he said, coming up with her.

She stood still again. Beyond the darkness of the trees she felt less lost in the desire of another, though still it was very dark. But she saw the stars, and faint forms of palm-trees standing back behind great hedges of box; she had more sense of possible freedom.

'Why did you move?' he said, almost sternly.

'The fountain. I heard it. And the bells! I felt—I realised suddenly that we are in Rome. I—I don't know! I realised Rome.'

'What are we to do? Will you throw everything up and come away with me? Will you, Dolores?'

'Hush—don't!'

She moved again, and went to the terrace that extends along the right-hand end of the palace to a balustrade from which the domes and towers of Rome are visible looking towards St. Peter's. By the balustrade she stopped, and turned.

'Just now,' she said, 'when I heard the fountain and the bells it seemed as if I saw some one near me.'

'Some one! Whom?'

'My husband!'

'What are you saying?'

He turned his head sharply and stared into the dark.

'And if you had seen him!' he said, looking again into her eyes, 'hasn't he let you see him for years with Mrs. Denzil? Hasn't he taken you to Frascati in order that you might see him with her there? He arranges his life to suit Mrs. Denzil. He would arrange your life, too, to suit her. All Rome knows it. He is her lover, of course. He has been her lover for years.'

By the sound of his voice Dolores knew that he believed

himself to be merely expressing a truth probably long ago in her possession.

'If he had seen you,' he added, 'perhaps it would have been best. Or are you afraid?'

She made no answer.

'Tell me, are you afraid?'

'Afraid of what?'

'Of your husband knowing.'

'I don't know whether I am afraid or not. I don't know anything to-night.'

Abruptly she desired to make him understand something of her helplessness, because she knew that he loved her.

'There's so much that one can never understand. Why should you care for me? You scarcely know me.'

'I know you better than he does, because I care.'

She looked down, bending her head a little, and the movement, the line of her neck, woke again within him the rage of excitement, of impotent anger against the wasted months of which he had spoken to her. They came, like successful enemies, in procession before his mind. And in his heart he cursed them.

'Dolores, don't let us ask each other questions. What does it matter why—or how? Youth isn't made for questions. It's given us to enjoy. I can't go on—' His dark face was suddenly distorted. 'No, I can't go on. I've come to the end of that!'

He began to speak almost incoherently, and as if to himself, to the mind that understood what no other mind could fully understand.

'To the end—to the end!' he repeated, almost furiously. 'From to-night all that's impossible. Why should I—how could any man—no! no!'

His lips twisted, his brows came down over his eyes. For an instant his face was like a bitter mask.

'Feel!' he exclaimed.

He seized the right hand of Dolores, and held it against his heart.

'D' you ask me to deny that any longer?'

For a moment her hand was still, and felt the beating that was his life. Then it twisted in his grasp.

'No, no, he's coming!'

'What?'

'Monsieur Leroux!'

'No!'

But even as he spoke he heard a faint footstep on the tiny stones of the terrace.

'We must speak to him,' Dolores said.

'No, no!'

He tightened his grasp on her hand.

'But he will pass close to us.'

'No, no!'

'Cesare!' she said.

She bent and looked into his face. At once he let go her hand.

'Forgive me! But——'

A sigh, that was almost a sob, came from him, and he turned his face away from her. A shadow emerged slowly from the darkness. The footfall was louder.

'Monsieur Leroux!' called Dolores. 'Are you going to bed?'

There was no answer, but the shadow drew slowly nearer.

'If it were not Leroux! If it were my husband!' Dolores thought. Her mind flashed back to the party at Mrs. Eldridge's, to the conversation about the *donna delinquente*, to her thought, 'If——' What would Theo be like? What would Theo do?'

'Monsieur Leroux! Monsieur Leroux!' she called, more sharply and insistently.

'Allo!'

'We are here looking at Rome.'

The sculptor came up.

'You are going to bed?'

'Yes, madame.'

'Do me a favour. Come with us to the gate of the villa, just to show the attendant we were really dining with you, and that you are partly responsible if we have kept him too late out of bed. Will you?'

'But with pleasure, madame!'

She began to walk rather quickly away from the palace.

'It is so lovely here on a summer night. We could not resist staying for a few minutes.'

Oh, what a poor, feeble hypocrite she felt as she made those banal remarks, unworthy of the garden, of the night, unworthy of hate, of love, of life! It was as if she concentrated in a couple of sentences all the insincerity and the clap-trap of the world. And after that look which Cesare had sent to the sculptor! But her life, she knew, had trained her in conventionality, and the words had come mechanically.

But what must Cesare be thinking of her?

At the gate they parted from Leroux. The gate swung slowly to. The servant was liberally tipped and wished *Bonne nuit*. They walked on towards the Sacré Cœur. And Cesare never spoke.

'We shall find a fiacre at the top of the steps, don't you think?'

She spoke almost with timidity. He did not answer.

'If not we had better go down into the Piazza. There is sure to be one there.'

Still he did not reply. She walked on a little faster. There were no fiacres before the Sacré Cœur. She hesitated for a moment, then turned and began to descend the steps. Cesare followed her. They came into the Piazza di Spagna. It was deserted. Dolores stood still for a moment, looking to right and left.

'Then I must walk!' she said, at last. 'It doesn't matter. It was only that I —'

She broke off, looking towards him. His silence began to beat upon her like a weapon. The complete withdrawal of the man who had poured forth his nature with such almost reckless sincerity but a few minutes before left her in a strange, in an almost alarming solitude. And she felt a sensation of guilt that troubled her.

'We had better go by the Due Macelli now, I suppose,' she said, with an effort to rid herself of the sensation.

As he said nothing, she added:

'Hadn't we? Hadn't we?'

'Whatever you please,' he almost muttered.

He did not look at her. She walked on with him at her side. And neither of them spoke till they had passed the Salone Margherita, and were in sight of the white and illuminated tunnel that leads from the Via Tritone to the

Via Nazionale. There, close to the Select Hotel, they met a wandering fiacre.

'*Carozza!*' Dolores called.

The coachman drew up and Dolores got into the fiacre. Cesare stood beside it, still looking down. Then he followed her.

'You will allow me to see you home, of course,' he said, formally.

'But it takes you out of your way, and really it isn't necessary.'

'I couldn't leave you, at this hour. I'm sure you will understand that. Palazzo Barberini!' he said to the coachman.

The fiacre moved on and again there was silence between them. It lasted without a break, till the fiacre came to the great gate that divides the garden of the Palazzo Barberini from Via Quattro Fontane. Then Cesare called out, 'Don't drive in!'

The man stopped the horse with a jerk. Cesare touched his arm. He turned and Cesare paid him.

'But why not keep him,' said Dolores.

'I'll walk home. I prefer it.'

'Well then . . .' She was about to hold out her hand, when he said, still with formality,

'I'll accompany you to your door, of course.'

The gate was opened. They walked towards the arcade. Dolores was beginning to feel frightened, not so much of Cesare as of the vague circumstance, life, fate, all that surrounds us and that we do not understand, combinations cast out ruthlessly by the unknown. Under the arcade Dolores stopped.

'We can say good-night here.'

'No, I must take you to your door.'

'I have my key.'

She showed it.

'I have only to walk upstairs and go in. You don't think I shall be murdered between the garden and my door?'

'You must not be alone till you are safe in your apartment.'

Was she so precious in his sight? Or was there another reason for his persistence? She hesitated. But she felt

that he meant to mount the long and faintly-lit stone staircase with her; she felt that even if she forbade him to come with her still he would come. Nevertheless she said, with a deep reluctance partly due to his almost freezing formality:

'But my husband may be at home. I have no reason to think so. But he might have come in to stay the night.'

'I wish to God he were in!' Cesare said, with sudden violence. 'I should like to have to do with a man to-night!'

'Aren't you forgetting me?' She said, but very gently.

'There is a limit to things,' he replied.

'Good-night.'

'No.'

'But——'

'No, no.'

He went towards the great gaping staircase, and she was almost obliged to follow him. His steps rang on the stone, as if he were the master resolutely ascending to what belonged to him. Were they two going, she wondered, up to a great crisis in her life? Now she felt completely in the grasp of events. If her husband by chance were within she felt that he must see at a glance all that had happened between herself and Cesare in the garden at Villa Medici. She did not argue that that was impossible. She felt absolutely that so it would be. And then her mind stopped short there.

Cesare waited and looked round. She joined him. And they went on without a word till they stood before the door of the apartment. Then he held out his hand.

'Your key!'

She gave him the key. He thrust it, roughly she thought, into the keyhole, turned it, and opened the door into the empty hall, which was dark till Cesare lit it.

'Now—good-night,' she said. 'And thank you.'

When she said that, without again holding out her hand, Cesare's face changed. All the formality, the freezing, unnatural restraint dropped away from him.

'Dolores!' he said. 'Dolores!'

She stood and looked at him. In opening the door he had stepped inside, holding it, as if to let her pass in. But she was still outside on the stone of the landing.

'What is—— ?' she began, and stopped.

'Let me come in!'

'No.'

'Let me come in, just into the drawing-room where I met you the other day when you asked me to come!'

'No, I can't, I mustn't.'

'Do you understand? Haven't I made you understand all that you mean to me?'

'Forgive me! Forgive me! And—and I will forgive you.'

'Let me come in, only for a moment. Just let me sit with you for a moment, talk with you for a moment. That's all. That shall be all. Let me do that. I promise that shall be all.'

'I mustn't! I mustn't!'

She whispered the words. She looked into the hall. Then listened for the sound of an opening door, for the sound of steps. And still she felt in the grasp of events, helpless, deprived of all genuine volition.

'Dolores, you have my promise—for to-night.'

He moved a little from the door; he took her hand, but now less like a lover than like a man of honour giving his word, clinching a compact to which he would hold at all costs.

'My promise, my promise!' he repeated.

'Why—why—what could we say? What can we have to say?'

'My promise!'

'But we don't know—we can't know whether——'

Suddenly, she never knew how—she was like a leaf moved by the wind—he drew her within, and the door was shut.

They stood together in the hall looking into each other's eyes.

'He isn't here!' said Cesare, whispering.

Dolores did not answer him, tell him to go again. Now she felt that anything she could do would be useless; that to-night a certain combination of events was decreed in which she was to be involved, like a body in a mass of fiercely revolving machinery.

'Let us go into the drawing-room.'

He spoke aloud. Dolores passed him, and went on till

she came to the green and red drawing-room. As she touched the button of the electric light, and the room sprang into view, the eyes of Lenbach's old man met hers. They seemed to be saying, 'I have waited. I shall not have to wait much longer!'

And as she steadily returned the gaze of the portrait she felt dazed. What seemed foreknowledge was alive in her. And yet something was within her ready to fight it, to deny its identity even.

She sat, almost dropped down, on a sofa opposite to the picture, and looked at the floor. She heard Cesare sit down close to her.

'Your promise!' she said. 'Your promise!'

'I will keep it.'

He did not touch her, but she felt as if all that was really him was stretching out to touch her, grasp her, make her his own. And her husband? Was he at Frascati, or within the palace? Once he had come from Frascati quite unexpectedly and very late, and had slept in the palace. He had had a reason. She had forgotten what it was. He might have had a reason to-night. He might at this moment be either in his bedroom, or be up reading in his library. Or he might have fallen asleep over a book while waiting for her as on that night when he returned very late from the bridge tournament. Without saying a word to Cesare she got up, crossed the room, and softly opened the door into the library. Darkness confronted her. She waited for a moment, then turned on the light. The room was empty. She turned off the light, shut the door gently, and softly went back to the sofa. And all this she did with intention, and yet with a vagueness in which any real purpose lay surely drowned and inert. She sat down.

'He isn't here!' said Cesare.

'We don't know,' she answered, with a sort of almost dull obstinacy.

He was silent for quite a long while. She did not look at him. Presently she began to wonder, but always vaguely, why he had been so fiercely determined to enter. Perhaps he had wished to find her husband there, to force on a tragedy regardless of her reputation, her future. She knew now that, despite his usual air of calm, even of almost serene

self-possession, he was capable of complete recklessness when driven by violent feeling. Till to-night she had not known him.

'Dolores!' he said at last.

She looked up.

'Why did you come in?' she said. 'What was the use? You might have ruined me. Did you wish to ruin me? What did you wish? And my husband may be here.'

She paused. Then she added:

'I believe he is here.'

'That is only a fancy.'

'No. I believe he is here. I feel as if he were in the palace.' She spoke without emotion, slowly, almost calmly.

'Why did you come in?'

'I could not leave you like that, in the street.'

'The street!'

'I felt I must be with you, see you—look at you, look at you—a little longer, at all costs. Can't you understand? Directly I'm away from you—now—darkness will come down on me, and nothingness. Don't you understand? And I shall be in darkness, nothingness, till I'm with you again.'

She gazed at him in silence, and, while she gazed, she was wrapped in the truth and concentration of his emotion as in a fur through which no touch of the cold could ever penetrate.

'That was my reason! I think that was my only reason. But if your husband had met us at the door I believe I should have been glad. I can't help it. For if he had met us wouldn't it have given me a right over you?'

'How could it?'

'If he had found me there I should have beaten him. If we had a duel I know I should—'

'Hush!'

'And if—neither, then I should have taken you away.'

'He might have believed the truth.'

'The truth!'

She looked towards the door by which they had come in.

'If he came in now——' she paused, almost as if expecting the door to be opened, 'he might believe it now. I——'

she looked at the floor. Her face was set. And again the almost dull obstinacy came into her voice.

'I have never been untrue to my husband.'

'And you think——?'

He stopped. An expression of strong astonishment came into his face.

'You don't always understand how things are,' she said.

Ever since, in the garden that night, he had spoken of her husband's faithlessness as if it were a matter of course, known, smilingly understood by all the world, she had felt as if her silence on that subject had been almost wickedness.

'What do I not understand?'

He leaned towards her.

'Tell me.'

'You don't understand about Mrs. Denzil and my husband.'

'And what is it that I have misunderstood?'

'My husband goes to Frascati only——'

'Yes?'

'Only for the children.'

After a pause he leaned back, and said:

'Si?'

And at that word for the first time a genuine doubt of her husband's faithfulness entered into the mind of Dolores. That his love was rapidly slipping from her, she believed. That, unless the miracle happened, she would lose it entirely, she believed. Even that, released from her, it would eventually go to the mother at Frascati she believed. Again and again, while she had been resolutely winning success as a mondaine, while she had been striving to fill her life and Theo's with various interests, she had looked forward, with a leaden dread, to the day when she would have lost Theo for ever. And she had seen him standing by the fruitful vine. But could Cesare be right? Was it possible that she had all this time been deceived? Was it possible? No; even now she rejected one doubt. Till Denzil's death there had been nothing. She knew that as certainly as she knew that she was living. But since his death? Her last conversation with Mrs. Massingham recurred to her. And another thing recurred to her: the way in which Edna Denzil and her husband had gone together across the loggia

to bend over little Theo; how they had sat down beside him, how they had talked and laughed with him; the difference when she had gone over to little Theo.

And then she saw again a darkness with a patch of white against it: which she had first seen as she drove down the hill alone into the Campagna.

Had she been living in a fool's paradise? And did every one know it? Something within her seemed to flame and turn icy cold. But she said dully, obstinately:

'My husband loves little children.'

'Si?' Cesare said, again.

She looked at him. He was leaning back against the high sofa. There was no sarcasm in his face. His black eyes were fixed upon her. In them she saw what seemed to her an expression of almost blank pity, compassion with a great naked wonder behind it.

And she went down into a great darkness. Struggling out of it with a terrible effort she got up slowly.

'I am so tired,' she said.

Cesare got up. He took both her hands.

'Let me go now! You will let me go?'

He pressed her hands in silence. There was no wonder now in his eyes. There was only the something else.

'Never, never has there been any woman so much a woman as you,' he said at last. 'That is why I love you as I do. That is why I am going.'

'Yes—yes.'

Her figure drooped, almost like a tired child's.

'That is why I shall come back.'

'Yes.'

He went away so quietly that she did not hear him go. She only knew that her hands were no longer held. And presently she felt as if the room had grown much colder.

CHAPTER XXXI

DOLORES stood where she was for a long time, but she did not know how long. At last she lifted her head, and looked

towards the door by which Cesare had gone out. She listened. A profound silence reigned in the palace. She looked at the clock. It was after midnight. But she did not go to bed. She sat down again on the sofa opposite to the portrait, and remained there, like one waiting. It seemed to her as if the events of the night were not finished yet. And sleep was impossible. She could not imagine that she ever had slept, or ever would sleep again. As she sat still there she seemed to see a great darkness by the aid of a strong light, Theo's lack of love for her by Cesare's love for her. To-night she knew something; she knew what a man's love can be. That knowledge was a possession that could never be taken from her while she lived. It made life different, it quickened life, it gave her a strange new sense of value.

Darkness, nothingness—without her! Cesare had said that, and with a voice, an expression in his eyes, which had made her believe it.

Darkness, nothingness!

How far down she had been into darkness! What a terrible effort she had had to make to fight her way up before she was able to say, 'I am tired!' Then that new sense of value was of little use to her? It ought to be as a weapon in her hand. But was it?

In the deep silence which reigned in the palace she heard again and again Cesare's voice. And it said only one word—'Si?' Incredulity, amazement, pity, perhaps even a faint and creeping contempt, all in one little word, the irresistible ejaculation of a mind.

'But Theo does love little children. He adores children. He has always longed to have children. It is that. It is only that.'

She formed the words with her lips. But her mind was shaking like an uncertain hand. Cesare had shown the power of his nature to her that night. Was power likely to be blind, mistaken? How frightful that one human being never can be sure of knowing another human being! If Theo had deceived, betrayed her, how should she know it?

She got up from the sofa. All this time the thoughts and feelings that had passed through her mind and heart had shifted over one immovable base: the belief that either Theo had been to the palace while she had been away, that

he was in it now, or, if not, that he would come to it that night, late though the hour was.

Now she meant to find out at any rate whether he was within the palace. She went, with precaution, through the suite of reception rooms. All were deserted. Then she stood before the door of the bedroom which her husband now occupied when he slept in the palace. The empty bedrooms in the apartment were usually kept locked. Dolores tried the handle of the door. It turned, and the door yielded to her pressure. Immediately she was aware of this fact she dropped her hand. The door was now a very little way open. She looked at the aperture, and saw that within the room there was a dim light. She stood still, staring at this faint section of light which showed her the outline of a picture-frame on the wall just beyond the door, and thinking that Cesare had only just gone away.

Theo was in the room. She felt sure of that. But what was he doing? And what had he been doing during the last half-hour? Apparently he had not heard the handle of the door tried and the door opened. For no sound came from within. She pushed the door again, stepped just inside the room, and again listened. And this time she heard a sound, soft, regular, very tranquil, the sound of a human being calmly breathing in profound sleep.

Had any one been watching her at this moment he would have seen an ugly expression of acute irony deform her face and die away from it.

'*L'amour veille!*' she thought.

And the whole palace seemed full of sleep, lethargy, profound indifference.

Agonise, tear yourself to pieces, fly into sin if you like, go down into the nameless places where the nameless deeds are done! But let me sleep!'

She shrank back to laugh. Then she went into the room.

Just beyond the door, and below the picture which she had seen by the faint light, there was a straight chair set against the wall. She sat down softly upon it and looked across the big room. The bed was opposite to her. Its head was against the wall in a line with the door. Beside it stood a little old table, with sturdy, twisted legs, which

she had picked up in an antiquity shop close to St. Peter's. The light in the room came from a shaded candle which stood on the table. By it lay an open book. Another book lay on the coverlet of the bed. Gogol, no doubt, with the translation at hand! Before Theo had fallen asleep he had been studiously going on with his Russian.

She longed to utter a loud cry, to utter a shriek. Her lips never moved. She sat quite still and looked at the bed.

She saw her husband. He was lying on his left side with his face turned towards her, but in such a position that she saw only his head and forehead clearly. In sleeping, perhaps, he had tucked in his chin, and shrunk down towards the bottom of the bed, which was a very long one made specially for him. As Dolores looked at his thick, disordered hair, she thought of Vi's little hands carefully, possessively at work upon it.

Now his conscious mind was dead. She wondered where his sub-conscious mind was, what it was doing. Perhaps it had gone to Frascati to convey some message to Edna Denzil.

If only she could know!

How happy Edna had looked the other day—had not she? When she had glanced up from little Theo's chair her lips were smiling. The corners of her mouth had turned up. Even her mother had said that she was getting over the death of her husband. She would not have got over such a tragedy unless Theo had been at hand to assist her. Always it is the man who assists the woman, the man who teaches the woman to forget. Never is it the woman who assists, who teaches the woman.

Never—never!

Dolores heard her teeth grinding one row upon the other.

Her gaze made no impression upon the sleeping man, although she was deliberately trying to wake him. If she did wake him what was she going to say to him? What was she going to do? She did not know, and now she began to wonder. What still astonished her was that it had been possible for Theo to return at night, to find her out, and to go quietly to bed and to sleep. For surely he must have called Carlino and asked him where she was. And Carlino must have said—but then she suddenly remembered that

she had left the palace alone. Carlino must have said that, then. And Theo would surely be astonished, uneasy at her being out alone in the night.

But no! The quiet music went on. And she listened, hating it.

Had Theo been asleep when she had seemed to see his figure close to her in the garden of Villa Medici? That wraith—existing only in her imagination, of course—had looked strangely indifferent.

Her husband stirred in the bed, muttered something incoherent, threw out one arm and tucked in his chin still more. She thought perhaps he was going to wake up, and a faint feeling of fear stole through her.

Yet all this time she had been 'willing' him to wake up. His brown hand hung down over the edge of the bed with outspread fingers, looking grotesque. If it belonged to a dead man could it look like that?

If Theo were dead, instead of asleep, and she were a free woman like Edna Denzil! What would she feel? What would she do?

He moved again. Suddenly it occurred to Dolores that she still had on her hat. She got up softly, and stole out of the room, went to her own room, quickly undressed, put on a white wrapper, and returned to Theo's room. As she came beyond the edge of the open door she saw his eyes fixed on her. They were widely opened. When she saw them she stopped short. And she felt as if her heart had stopped too. She stood quite still, and her husband continued to stare at her with his face sideways on the pillow. There was no penetration in his look at first, but gradually consciousness dawned in his eyes, and with it surprise.

He lifted his head.

'What is it?' he said.

He sat up on the bed.

'Dolorette!'

'Theo!'

'What is the matter?'

'Nothing.'

'But what are you doing here then? What time is it?'

He felt for his watch. While he was doing this a clock in the hall struck one.

'One o'clock!' he said. 'What made you get up?'

'Get up!'

'Yes, get up out of bed?'

'Well, I—I'm not at all sleepy. And I thought—it seemed to me, I don't know why, that you were in the palace.'

'Perhaps, without being aware of it, you heard me when I came to your room.'

She drew a chair to her and sat down, but not very near to him.

'Did you come to my room?'

'Yes, as soon as I arrived.'

'What time was that?'

'Not late. But I suppose the servants had gone to bed. I let myself in. It was between ten and eleven. I expected to find you still up.'

'And you came to my room?'

'Yes. But I walked softly. I only just opened the door, and when I found you were there I went off to bed. What is it?'

'Nothing. Why do you ask?'

'Are you—there's nothing the matter?'

'Of course not. Did you bring a light with you when you came to my room?'

'Oh no. I only opened the door and listened. When I heard you were asleep I came away at once. But even that may have disturbed you.'

'You heard—did I seem to be sleeping soundly?'

'I don't know. I came away immediately for fear of startling you. You must have gone very early to bed.'

'But why did you come in to Rome and at night? I didn't ex—— you never said you were coming.'

'I didn't know it.'

He leaned one arm on the pillow, and shifted his position slightly.

'It's rather a nuisance,' he said, speaking in a casual sort of way, 'but I've got to run over to England.'

'To England!'

'Yes. I shall get away to-morrow.'

'You're going to England to-morrow!'

'I just said so.' He still kept up the casual tone. 'The

fact is—but talking so much at night will drive sleep right out of us.'

'Never mind if it does. What does it matter? Why must you go?'

'Well, you know about those—but no, of course you don't. It's not very interesting. But Edna has two houses in London which Francis left to her. A good part of her income comes from them. They're large houses—one in Westbourne Terrace and the other in Lancaster Gate. But I'm sure——'

'No, do tell me!'

'Well, the tenant in Lancaster Gate has just gone smash and bolted. Edna's solicitor has telegraphed, and I'm going over at once to see what's to be done to get things straight. The fellow had the house on a twenty years' lease and has only been in seven months.'

'Only seven!'

'There! now you know almost as much as I do.'

'But why must you go to England?'

'But I've just said why.' I must look into the matter, and see Edna's solicitor. It's a serious thing for her if she loses her rent even for a short time. And between ourselves, I'm not very satisfied with the way her solicitor has managed certain affairs for her. But I can't go into all that at this hour of night. I'm very thankful Theo's so much better. Otherwise, I don't think I could have gone.'

'You said you wouldn't go to England this summer. Don't you remember?'

'Of course I didn't intend to go again.'

'I said, "When are we going?" and you——'

'This is duty, not pleasure. Even at this time of night I'm sure, if you think, you can see the difference.'

A faint smile flickered over her face and died away.

'I'm tired of thinking,' she murmured.

And she looked down.

'Then much better go to bed.'

'Yes. Good-night, Theo.'

She got up and left the room without looking at him again.

And she shut the door firmly behind her.

On the following day Sir Theodore started for England.

CHAPTER XXXII

Two days after Sir Theodore's departure for England a certain innkeeper in Olevano Romano, between thirty and forty miles distant from Rome, was in excellent spirits. That summer, for some mysterious reason which the good man could not discover, but which he was quite sure had had nothing to do with any fault of his, his season had been a poor one. The artists who in the summer months of the year often make Olevano their home, had not arrived at Casa Truschi. It was really as if they had boycotted the little house with its white walls and its green shutters, its long pergolas, its arbours, its earthen terrace set with roses and geraniums. Yet there had been no change in the management of the inn. Erminia still made those omelettes, not unlike small squares of blanket, which so many poor painters had eaten with relish. The veal that had followed them for a year and a day, and much longer, Erminia was quite ready to send after them still, with its companion potatoes cut into large lozenges and fried in oil of the olive. The thin red wine was there, 'Vino del Paese,' as Erminia always called it, when any indiscreet inquirer demanded its name, and the heavy, dark-coloured bread. The uneven brick floors were dusted. The beds were duly made, and lay proudly on the wire mattresses. Bees hummed lazily in the arbours, among ivy, roses, and vines. Below the garden, on the long slopes of the sun-kissed hills, the olives displayed their subtle beauty, delicate, almost shrinking, of silver-green and green silver. The songs of the sun-browned peasants came up from the vines, with the cries and the laughter of children, and the tocsin of bells from the little town clustered about the mass of grey rock, with its dark green clothing of shrubs and herbage, and its ruined tower.

Olevano had not changed. Still, near the road to Subiaco, the oaks of the Serpentara rustled their leaves as if in a chorus of thankfulness to the romantic artists who saved them. And the Sabine mountains held towards evening, as of old, strange messages of light from the declining sun,

messages precious and beautiful sent surely to those mountains alone, as friend sends heart-words to friend. Valmontone, home of the castle, San Vito, Rocca di Cave, sent up their smoke to catch the last rays, that even it might be turned to pathos and glory, to something that stirred the imagination of those who beheld it streaming forth into the limpid magic that the twilight was creeping near to embrace.

And Casa Truschi had not changed. But, as Benedetto Truschi had said many times that summer, 'times had changed.' He had groaned indeed so often over *tempi passati* that his cronies in the town, to which he often descended from his remote eyrie high 'above everything,' as he was fond of declaring, were quite astonished now that he smiled and looked gay. They asked him the reason for his altered mood. Were the painters coming at last? or had the breeze, travelling over the heads of the olives from the Alban mountains or the sea, whispered of English spinsters, with small means but strict notions of honesty and weekly settlements, packing at Ostia, Nettuno, or Rocca di Papa, preparatory to a raid on Olevano?

Benedetto shook his large and round head, pulled first one and then the other of his big brown ears, and uttered a loud *macchè!* That did not tell the gossips much, but it was all the innkeeper chose to tell them. He was living alone in the inn with his daughter, the before-mentioned Erminia. Erminia did not come down into the town just then. So she was not questioned. But the sudden good temper of Benedetto was shrewdly associated by more than one gossip with a grey torpedo-loped motor which had flashed through the town the day before, driven by a man who looked made of cap and goggles, and which, after a short stay in the neighbourhood—just where was not generally known—had flashed back in a cloud of white dust down the road to Rome.

Those who knew Benedetto best felt sure that his gaiety was connected with his pocket, and they surmised that the daring motorman, who had driven so fast but so skilfully, and who had looked like a representative figure of modern progress and audacity, was connected very possibly with both.

They were right.

The man who had driven the torpedo-shaped motor from

Rome to Olevano Romano was Cesare Carelli, and he had written to Benedetto, an old acquaintance of his, to meet him at a certain place in the road beyond the village. It was not possible for a motor to gain the terrace in front of Casa Truschi, which was approached only by a long footway roofed by a pergola. So Benedetto had descended to hold a colloquy, but not to the garden gate.

'It was Don Cesare Carelli,' he told his widowed daughter when he came back to the lonely house on the height. 'Who used often to stay with me when he was a lad and I was at Terracina. It was duck shooting he came for then in the Pontine Marshes.'

'He doesn't come here for duck shooting does he, papa?' observed Erminia, fixing a pair of eyes, which looked as if they had recently been carefully oiled, on her father. 'And in summer, too!'

'No. He's come here for something different. And there's no cause for us to make a great talk about it. Just you come in here!'

At the moment the little inn was quite empty. Benedetto had been speaking to his daughter on the terrace which overlooked an immense view, and the town. Now he led the way heavily and rather mysteriously up the outside staircase of stone to a balcony under a pergola. The one sitting-room of the inn opened on to this balcony by French windows. When his daughter had joined him there he stood still for a moment. Then he said:

'In here!' and entered the sitting-room.

This fastness had a tiled floor of very faded pink bricks, large and uneven. The ceiling of wood was coloured with a sickly pinkish hue and was not high. On the walls was a venerable paper displaying a pattern of magenta on a pale gold ground. Against it were nailed many pictures. Here was to be seen the Holy Father, Pius the Tenth, with white hair and a grave, almost sad expression, clad in a red cloak over white, and adorned with a gold chain from which depended a pearl cross. Round about him were pictures of women in ruffs with dark hair and pointed noses. And almost immediately opposite to him was a portrait of a cardinal with a red cloak and a cross, beneath which was written in heavy black letters: 'Scipio Cardinalis Bur-

ghesius in hac Domo moratus est Anno 1779.' Near him was fixed a large mandolin. A mirror with a red rose painted on its surface reflected part of the room. Beneath it on a ledge covered with yellow-green plush was a plaster group of beggars in attitudes of misery and despair. A red sofa invited to repose. There were two pink armchairs, with white antimacassars on backs and arms, several chairs upholstered in green and in yellow rep; and near to the Holy Father there was a handsome cardinal's chair covered with red damask, much worn and faded, but still dignified, with its high back, wooden arms, and carved knobs heavily gilded. A good-sized table covered with a clean white cloth stood exactly in the middle of the floor.

The most characteristic features of this room were, however, supplied by the doors. Evidently the painters, who had in prosperous times frequented the inn, had been moved by emotions of gratitude, or perhaps by fantasy, to embellish these with the ripe fruits of their genius. One, no doubt religiously inclined, had painted on the door near 'Seppio Cardinalis Burghesius' a long procession of young girls in white, wreathed with unknown flowers, winding up with submission to a bishop who extended large hands in blessing. The touching effect of this culmination was not increased by the anti-clerical demonstration of a painter of a different way of thinking, who had filled part of the benign sky above the procession with a number of fiercely-tinted boys, whose almost devilish faces and prancing puppet-like limbs suggested acute derision expressed with an ardent impiety. On another door, at the back of the room, out of the Pope's range of vision, a post-impressionist had yielded to his sense of reality and truth. Here a masher, realistically thin, and indeed almost concave in the region of the lower waistcoat buttons, sunk prostrate on a cane armchair of vivid scarlet, his top hat tilted to the front of a melon-shaped bald head, dreamed over his high white collar on a green lawn starred with immense white blobs. In his boneless left hand he sustained, as by some miracle of the will with which the physical body had no connection, a large cigarette. And he extended towards the universe a pair of enormous feet encased in gold-coloured boots. Near him a balloon-shaped mauve woman, with a tiny head, fell forward to smell

a standard something erupting in a disease of pink spots. In the distance two trees, like two gollywogs, in yellow pots, the same colour as the boots of the masher declined to cast any shade.

Standing with one hand on the table in the centre of this room, and pulling at his ear, Benedetto said to his daughter:

'There's some one coming here to-morrow.'

'Is there? How many?'

'It's a lady.'

'How long is she going to stay?'

'*Chi lo sa?* It seems she's been ill, or upset, or something, and she wants to be quite quiet.'

'Well, it's quiet here.'

'Si, si! That's why she comes. She wants the whole Inn.'

'There's nothing against her having it, is there?'

'Nothing at all. We must do the best for her, make her very comfortable. She's accustomed to be very comfortable.'

'Most ladies are.'

'Si, si! But this one's a very special lady, and wants special comfort.'

'There's always the veal and——'

'No, it's the rooms.'

'She's bringing some one with her, I s'pose?'

'Some one with her?'

'Won't she have a servant?'

'*Macche!*'

The oiled eyes of Ernesta regarded her papa with robust curiosity.

'What should any one want with a servant out here? She'll come just as she is, and you must do your best to make her comfortable, without talking about it. Here's a chance for us to finish up as if we'd had artists all the summer.'

'I'll make her comfortable. Where does she come from?'

'Naples. I fancy she's an American come by sea.'

'What time is she coming?'

'Any time to-morrow afternoon. Have the bedrooms ready.'

Before Erminia could make any further remark father went out of the room with decision.

On the following afternoon about two o'clock, when a haze of heat hung about the flanks of the mountains, and every peasant and townsman who respected himself was lost in the siesta, Benedetto, looking down from the terrace of Casa Truschi, saw a grey motor-car slum over the bit of white road that was visible below near the Albergo Roma, and vanish among the trees on the hill that led upward to the town.

'Erminia,' he called, turning.

'What is it?' cried a harsh voice from the depths of the house.

'Come here!'

In a moment his daughter appeared under the pergola at the top of the steps.

'The Principino will be here in a moment. I've just seen the motor-car pass below.'

'The Principino! He's not going to sleep here, is he?'

'Not that I know of. But . . .'

'Is the lady with him?'

'*Chi lo sa?* But anyhow he's sure to come in and look at the rooms. I'll go to the gate now to meet him.'

And Benedetto hurried off along the path, and disappeared under the tunnel of vines and creeping plants that extended down the slope to the road. Within a few minutes he returned, walking respectfully, but talking quite familiarly, with Cesare Carelli, who wore a pale yellow linen motor coat and a cap protected with a linen covering, and who was white as a miller with dust.

Cesare did not pause even for a moment to look at the marvellous view. He cast a swift glance around him over the terrace and the small garden below it, went into the ivy-covered arbour near the steps, saw that it was empty, came out, and at once mounted to the sitting-room, followed closely by Benedetto.

There were pink roses on the table in the middle of the room. The floor had been thoroughly swept that morning, clean antimacassars sewn on the red armchairs, the pictures dusted. Cesare stood still for a moment with one muscular hand resting on the table. The silence of summer in this

eyrie of the hills was beautiful. It was broken only by the humming of the bees, by the very faint rustle of leaves in the pergola over the balcony as a momentary breath of wind touched them, by the sound of a church bell below rising out of the valley. The bell ceased almost at once. The little wind died away. Only the bees hummed on, travelling slowly from flower to flower.

Cesare sighed, and took his hand from the table.

'The bedroom is ready?' he asked.

'Eccellenza, si! I will call my daughter.'

'No, no, don't! Where is it?'

The inn had only the floor on which they were, with cellars and offices below it. Benedetta opened a door to the left near the French windows and showed Cesare into a single bedroom, which communicated with another slightly larger room containing two beds. In each of these rooms vases of closely packed small pink roses had been placed. The floors were of brick uncarpeted. Beside each bed lay a small yellow and red rug. Three or four straw chairs were carefully set back against the walls. There was no attempt at comfort. But cleanliness reigned, and the beds looked as if they were good ones.

The second bedroom opened by a French window on to a narrow balcony, which ran along one end of the house at right angles to the windows which looked out upon the terrace, and commanded a splendid view of the rugged Sabine mountains, and of the near hill sides, covered with olive trees, and intersected by winding paths. Far below the white road could be seen, the road leading from, leading to, Rome. Immediately beneath this balcony a ~~gravel~~ path sloped gently down, then turned abruptly and ran back below a stone wall to the sunken garden beyond the terrace. A thickly overgrown pergola covered, and entirely concealed the second section of the path, so that any one standing upon the balcony saw only a roof of canes, ivy, and climbing roses, and people descending from the terrace, on their way to the sunken garden, disappeared from view directly they turned the acute angle of the path.

Cesare came out on this balcony, and stood there for several minutes with his motor cap pulled down over his eyes. He looked first at the roof of the long pergola.

Beneath it was a narrow stone bench which he knew of. There one could sit in shadow, hidden, looking out over Nature's heart-gladdening wildness. There one could listen to the loud songs of the sun-browned peasants, see their robust figures passing below on those winding paths of the rich, warm earth. His eyes travelled away. The road to Rome was marked out by some black-green cypresses. They held his eyes. But suddenly they were obscured by a dense cloud of white dust which arose from the road, which moved rapidly on, which slowly dispersed in the golden air. His eyes shone. He turned round and saw Erminia looking at him over her father's fat shoulders.

'*Buon giorno!*' he said quickly.

'*Eccellenza, buon giorno!*'

'The lady will be here in a moment. Her motor has just gone by. Get her a good cup of tea. You know how to make good tea?'

'Eccellenza, si! All the signori and the signore who ——'

'That's it! Make it very good, with lemon and biscuits. And do everything you can for the signora. She wants to be very quiet. Let her alone. Don't bother her. But make her comfortable. She isn't bringing a maid.'

He held out his hand. As he disappeared Erminia stood regarding a fifty lire note with a broad smile of rapture.

'Is the principe staying here, too, papa?' she asked, swinging round to her father.

'No, of course not. He has only come to see that the lady is comfortable.'

'And is he going back to Rome to-day?'

'What does it matter to you?'

After a minute he added, in a surly voice:

'Don Cesare has put up at the Roma.'

With a shrug of his shoulders he left the room.

Almost at the same moment a taxi-cab stopped at the gate of the garden, and a tall woman swathed in a voluminous white veil got slowly out. As she did so Cesare opened the gate. She passed in quickly under the pergola and walked straight on, followed in a moment by Cesare holding a dressing-case, and by the chauffeur who carried a bag with an unusual amability that had been produced in the usual way. The woman, who was Dolores, did not

enter the inn. She walked to the terrace, and while the two men carried in bag and dressing-case she stood with her back turned to the house looking out over the view towards Rome. She had slowly unfastened and unwound her veil. Quite still she stood till she heard on the stone steps descending feet, and Cesare's voice saying: 'That 's enough! You can go now!' Then she turned sharply, and opened her lips. The chauffeur took off his cap in parting salutation.

'Wait a moment!' she said.

'Signora?'

'What is it?' asked Cesare. 'Can he do anything more for you?'

'No, no.'

She turned quickly away. She had not meant the man to see her face, into which now a low and faint flush of red was creeping.

She heard him going away down the path.

'You 've got his address?' she said. 'Where is he going?'

'Back to Rome. Yes, I 've got his address. A telegram will bring him over at any moment to fetch you. And my motor is at the Roma.'

'I can't use that.'

'He can always come in two hours.'

'Yes?'

She stared out over the view.

'Do you want to see the rooms? Or would you rather come into the arbour and have tea there?'

She glanced to the right and saw the soft dark of the shady place.

'Let us have tea in there.'

He smiled at the 'us.' Till that moment he had been looking grave, almost troubled. Now his face cleared, changed marvellously.

'Yes, yes. It 's shady and cool. You will rest, you 'll love it. Come in.'

Dolores obeyed him and went into the arbour.

The ivy had grown for years very thickly over it, and made now what was almost a twilight within it. A table, constructed of a block of grey stone set on a sturdy pedestal

of brick and dried earth, stood in the middle, with chairs, brought there by the thoughtful Benedetto, beside it. Through the opening by which they entered the glory of the sun seemed trying to follow them. But the soft twilight prevailed against it. Quickly Cesare drew forward the chairs.

'I wish they were better ones,' he said, almost angrily.

'Never mind. What does it matter?'

'I must get something else. I'm certain they have a sort of *chaise longue*. Only one minute!'

He took her hand, kissed it, held it long to his lips. Then he let it go and hastened away.

Dolores let her hand fall on the table and lie there on the stone. She was sitting with her back to the path by which she had come up to the inn, and her face towards the green wall of the arbour which partially shut out the great view towards Rome and over the town of Olevano. As she sat there she heard faint sounds rising up to her from out of the midst of the tall and narrow houses, faint human sounds. The little world was waking from its siesta. She leaned forward against the stone slab and listened intently. Now she thought she heard cries of children. Bells sounded and ceased. But the human noises persisted. Children playing! Yes, she heard that. She got up, went over to the farther side of the retreat, and looked down through the roses and canes, and the ivy leaves. Immediately beneath her was a slope covered with olive trees, leading straight to the first habitations, crowded against other high houses which clustered about the great mass of rock on the top of which rose the fragment of tower. From the farther edge of this rock a sort of spine of houses disappeared in the direction of the valley. Although now bathed in a glory of sunshine Olevano at this moment to Dolores looked both wild and sad. In coming to it she had passed Palestrina, Genazzano with its fortress of the Colonnas, Cave. And they, too, had seemed to her wild and sad, with their swarming populations of dark-eyed, staring people. The chauffeur had made a mistake in entering Genazzano, and had deviated from the road. To get back he had made an almost complete circuit of the town and had passed at the foot of the gigantic bastions of the fortress. From a window far above her

Dolores had seen a big, brown woman lean out holding a baby at her breast and suckling it.

She thought of that woman now as she heard the children playing beneath her in some hidden place. Beyond Olevano, over its yellow-tiled roofs, a great stretch of gently rising country, rich in colour, hazy and romantic, stretched out, ending in a line of hill which, depressed towards the centre, suggested sea waves beyond, and to right and left rose into mountain summits. Somewhere over that line, was Frascati, was Rome, was Palazzo Barberini.

But children were playing—playing. Their soft cries filled her ears. Where were they? She could not discern any running and leaping forms, restless, driven by the warm young blood within them. She lifted her hands, parted the canes, the roses. But no, she could not see those children, as she had seen the baby at the breast of the leaning woman in that old Colonna fortress.

She heard a step. She started and turned. And even as she did so a voice in her ear seemed to whisper: 'Children—children—they must be born! A child—a child must be born!' Quite clearly she seemed to hear it speaking close in her ear.

Cesare stood in the entrance of the arbour, carrying a folding-chair. Under his left arm was a striped red and yellow cushion.

'I've got it,' he began. 'But—how startled you look! Did I startle you?'

'No.'

'You were looking at the view?'

'Yes, at the town. It—it seems to be full of children. Don't you hear them?'

She slightly lifted her right hand.

'Little rascals—*birichini*! They always make such a row. But who has the heart to stop them?'

He arranged the chair.

'Are you fond of children?' she asked, with her big eyes always fixed upon him.

'Yes, of course. Let me put you into your chair.'

She knew how he was for ever longing to touch her. She let him touch her, draw her down into the chair with a strong pressure which was a caress through which almost

his soul seemed speaking to her. He arranged the cushion behind her little dark head, from which she removed her hat. Then he stood for a moment at the back of the chair motionless where she could not see him.

'What is it?' she said. 'What are you doing?'

He bent and kissed her hair.

'I am—I am—Dolores!'

There was a sound of china rattling. Quickly he went over to the other side of the table.

'Here is your tea!'

Erminia came with the tray. There were two cups upon it. She set it down on the stone carefully, then stood staring.

'That's all!' said Cesare. 'We don't want anything else.'

'Erminia!'

Benedetto's rough voice was heard calling loudly. Erminia went slowly away.

'Don't move. I will give you your tea. I will do everything for you.'

He poured the tea out with care, as if it were a precious liquid, and brought her the cup.

'I'll put it here on the arm of the chair. Will you have lemon?'

'Please!'

He cut the big lemon in two, and squeezed the juice of one half into her cup. He had taken off his coat and cap, and got rid of the dust which had covered him.

'I scarcely ever take tea, but to-day'

He poured some out for himself.

'You took it that day on Como.'

'Yes, after my swim. How long ago that seems!'

'Yes. That seems very long ago.'

He brought his chair nearer to hers.

'I can't have the table between us. Is it pretty good—the tea?'

'I think so. I'm glad to have it.'

'If only we could have come here together! I can't bear you out of my sight.'

'Don't say that.'

'Why mustn't I say it?'

'I don't—you mustn't feel like that.'

'Why?'

'Because—think of the future.'

Violently almost he replied:

'I will not. To-day it would be madness to The man who can't live for— —' he broke off. 'You know why it would be madness!'

'Yes,' she said, in a changed voice. 'It would be. No, don't let us! Don't let us! We must shut it out.'

She closed her eyes for a minute. When she did that the children's voices below seemed to grow much louder.

'That's easy to-day—and it will be easier presently,' he said.

She opened her eyes and looked at him.

'I feel as if I should never quite understand you,' he added, looking down into her eyes.

'Don't try to. It's—it's better not.'

'But I feel as if I would give half my life really to understand you.'

'You never could.'

'I! And any one else?'

Dolores thought of Nurse Jennings.

'If any one ever could,' she said, 'it would not be a man.'

'Surely you don't want to be understood by a woman?'

'But does it matter what we want? Oh no!'

'To us it matters.'

'To us—but that's nothing, nothing.'

He moved in his chair, almost, she thought, like a big uneasy boy. Now and then, often indeed, she was conscious of the boy in Cesare, despite his intensely masculine physique. But uneasiness was rare in him. And she had never seen him look self-conscious.

'Nothing? What do you mean? I think it is everything.'

The uneasiness seemed to drop away from him. His powerful manhood asserted itself.

'Only want enough,' he said in his firm and strong voice. 'I mean with all you are, and you are nearly, or quite, the whole way to getting it. But some people, many people, don't really care. I didn't, I think, for years and years.

And then—I did, I did!' He drew in the fingers of his left hand hard till the back of the hand was ridged. 'And then I did. And—he lowered his voice—'I 'm here with you.'

'You think it is really enough to want with all one's force? Perhaps it is. I don't know that I had ever thought of that before.'

She frowned, like one who is thinking, or wishing, profoundly.

'But no, it isn't,' she said.

She paused.

'I remember——' she began, and stopped.

'What? What?'

'Long ago, when I was far away from Rome, it seemed to me as if some one at a great distance off was influencing me.'

'Some one? Did you know who it was?'

'I felt as if it were you.'

The blood rushed to his face, the triumphant blood.

'I influencing you! When was it?'

'It was in the summer—last summer.'

'When I put an end to——'

He thought of Lisetta and was silent. Suddenly he remembered her passion, her intense, almost insane jealousy, her despair when he broke with her. And he remembered her look, the sound of her voice in the Giamarchos' drawing-room when she said, 'You were kind enough to bet a thousand lire to five hundred against me. I only wanted to thank you. Good night, Carlo.'

If Lisetta knew! If she could see him now!

'Why do you look so grave?' said Dolores, slowly.

She lifted her cup from the arm of the chair and drank some more tea. Was the cloud coming down on him too?'

'I—it was stupid of me to go to the gate and meet you,' he replied. 'Because of the chauffeur.'

'I wondered that you did it.'

'But you said nothing.'

'No—when it was done what was the use?'

'I oughtn't to have let him see me know that I was here. But when I knew you were there I forgot everything. But I don't suppose it matters. Oh, how I hate all the things

that tie us down, that prevent us from being free! But we won't think of them to-day.'

His voice changed. The grave, almost sad look went out of his face.

'No one will come here now. We are on the top of the world.'

He stood up.

'Will you have some more tea?'

'No, thank you.'

She got up, too, as if in reply to his restless movement, his changed voice. They had sought the shade. But surely they needed the sun.

'Let us go out!' she said. 'I have seen nothing here yet.'

'I will show you everything.'

She did not put on her hat, but opened her parasol and went out on to the terrace. A low coping of stone, perhaps a foot and a half high, ran along it. Red geraniums bloomed in iron-clamped tubs close to the house. Some small pollarded trees threw patches of shade on the wrinkled earth.

Erminia and her father had disappeared. The inn, with its green wooden shutters closed, was like a deserted house asleep. Nothing moved but a white cat, which looked as if it had just washed itself for the year so exquisitely clean was it. Slowly, and walking with a peculiar delicacy, it crossed the far end of the terrace and vanished, going down the slope which led to the pergola of the lower garden.

'Shall I show you the house first?'

'Yes.'

'He led the way up the steps.'

'This is the sitting-room.'

Dolores shut her parasol and stepped inside. Directly she was in the room, she said:

'The Pope here!'

'Why not? You will find his portrait in hundreds of houses of this kind through all Italy.'

'How sad he looks! And all these women in ruffs, and the doors! What a strange little room!'

She sat down by the table and laid her parasol on the white cloth.

'Is it true?' she said, 'that at Genazzano, on the way

here, there is a famous Madonna, the *Madonna del Buon Consiglio?*'

'Of course, quite true. But——'

'As I was coming out of Genazzano a man, who was directing the chauffeur, said, "Does the lady want to visit the chapel of the *Madonna del Buon Consiglio?*"'

'Coming out of Genazzano! But it is off the road! You never ought to have gone there.'

'But we did. The chauffeur made a mistake. And so I did go there. But I did not see the Madonna.'

'What does it matter?'

She did not answer. She got up from the table.

'Your room is in here,' Cesare said, opening the door to the left near the French window. 'The farther room is the best, because of the balcony.'

She went in. He stood for a moment, as if undecided. Then he came away from the door, and walked round the sitting-room examining the pictures. He lit a cigarette, went out to the balcony, and stood by the rail staring into the distance.

Surely he had chosen well. This place was remote, although only two hours by motor from Rome. And it was in a magnificent position. No one would come. The inn was tiny, and Dolores had the whole of it. They were in an almost perfect solitude. The blood quickened in his veins. But Dolores had strangely altered his mood since she had arrived at the inn. Never had he felt her to be so strange, so mysterious, as now. The nearer he drew to her the more intimately he came into her life, the more passionately he desired her, the more strongly he was conscious that she was mysterious, that she eluded him. He had never felt thus with any other woman. And in her mystery was there not a curious, an inexplicable sadness?

Lisetta had held no mystery such as this, clever, brilliant woman of the world though she was. He had been so sure of Lisetta. Perhaps soon he would feel again that sense of sureness, of dominating manhood, which he now desired to feel, which a man ought always to feel. Yes. To-morrow all would be different.

Again the blood leaped in his veins. And he flung away the faint uneasiness which had begun to tarnish his joy,

his triumph. And when, presently, Dolores returned to the sitting-room, the cloud had lifted from his face, from his bearing. And he looked like a man, who, at last, had his hands on his greatest desire.

'The rooms are very simple,' he said. 'I've been so accustomed to roughing it, living anyhow, when I've been shooting, that perhaps I'm a bad judge for you. Do you hate them?'

'No. I have been out on the balcony.'

'It's a great view, isn't it?'

'Wonderful. Take me to that pergola under the balcony. I've been looking down on its green roof.'

'It's a regular hiding-place. And there's a bench. Come.'

They went out, turned the angle of the inn, descended the sloping path beneath the balcony of Dolores' room, and came into the pergola.

'Let us sit down here,' Cesare said.

'Yes. And then, presently, I'll rest till towards evening.'

He touched, but only just touched, her hand with the back of his, almost as if by accident.

'You shall rest. I'll leave you. I'll go down to the Roma for a little, over the slope here. There's a path that takes you to the inn without going through the town. But need I stay away from you very long?'

He felt, and strangely considering the circumstances, the delicacy of her womanhood, the atmosphere of sensitiveness in which she always seemed to move. Oh, the difference between her and Lisetta! And he asked the question gently, trying not to show too plainly his desire. But he wished with an ardour which was almost savage that the sun would sink and the darkness fall about them.

Dolores sat down on the narrow bench and he sat beside her, but not quite close to her. He did not dare to do that just then, because of his nature. She looked down over the olive-covered slopes that stretched away below the pergola, and saw the white road far off with its faithful cypresses near it. Some peasants were passing on a winding path, singing in chorus as they went. They disappeared, slowly, among the trees, but their voices were audible, floating up through the sparkling air, after they were gone.

They left their song behind them, like a kind and light-hearted message.

'I must have a little rest,' Dolores said. 'Do you go down there to that road?'

'Yes. That's where the Roma is.'

'I'm glad I came up here instead.'

'You could not have stayed there. It is right on the high road. But at this time of the year every one is away. No one we know would pass.'

Directly he had spoken from the road arose a cloud of white dust.

It travelled quickly, dispersed, disappeared, floating back from a small, dark object.

'There's a motor coming!' said Dolores.

'Not here. No one will come here. You have the whole house.'

'But to an inn——'

'No one shall disturb you. I have spoken to Benedetto.'

But Dolores still looked fixedly down at the place where the dust had been. And the light-hearted song died away into silence.

'That's some one going to Subiaco, no doubt,' said Cesare, firmly, cheerfully. 'Subiaco is quite near here.'

'I know.'

'Why do you always look at that road?'

'I don't know.'

She got up restlessly.

'Let us go back to the terrace. And then I think I will rest. You see, it was a long, hot drive. I've brought a book. I can sit out and look at the view, and read till you come back.'

'When may I come, Dolores?'

She waited, looking at him. Then she said:

'On the terrace I'll tell you.'

'Don't you like this pergola? I like it better than any other part of the garden.'

'Why?'

'Because the house is hidden.'

'Yes, but I don't know. I think, when I am alone, I will sit on the terrace.'

She did not tell him that under the pergola she could

not hear the children's voices, and that she needed to hear them again.

He took her back to a wooden bench which had its back against the ivy-covered arbour in which they had had tea. She looked quickly away to the town, which now was full of voices.

'Yes, I'll sit here.'

'I'll get the *chaise longue*.'

'No, don't. I like this bench.'

He stood for a minute.

'Shall I fetch you your book?'

'Will you? I left it on a chair on the balcony.'

He went to fetch it, and glanced at the title as he brought it to her. It was the second part of Goethe's *Faust*. She thanked him and said:

'You are good to me.'

'Be good to me!' he whispered, leaning down to her. 'When may I come?'

She looked away to the little town fixedly. Then she said in a low voice:

'When it's evening.'

He turned away slowly and left her.

CHAPTER XXXIII

When he had gone Dolores opened her little book. She glanced at the page near the end of the volume, and her eyes lit on the words, 'Magna Peccatrix.' Immediately she shut the book. Why had she brought it? In coming away from Palazzo Barberini she had caught it up without even reading the title. Her thought had been merely, 'I must have something.' But to-day she did not want philosophy, the ruthless working out of punishment of sin, the tragedy of women brought before her mind. She laid the book down on the earth at her feet and, turning on the bench she gazed at Olevano. From this bench, away in the town she could see an open space surrounded by tall, narrow houses, the

playground of the children whose voices filled her ears now Cesare was gone. She saw children, diminished by distance to tiny shapes, rushing hither and thither, crossing and recrossing the space, vanishing, reappearing, never still even for one instant. A fury of life seemed to govern them, life that came out of mothers, life that fathers had helped to bring into being. At that moment, as she gazed at the little darting shapes, almost for the first time in her life Dolores felt herself to be rather the minute fragment of a gigantic whole than an isolated individual.

'Do I matter?' she thought. 'Except as that fragment without which the whole would be incomplete—perhaps? Do I matter?'

Considerations of good and evil now dropped away from her. It was as if her tired mind shed them, no longer able to bear their burden. She sank into a curious condition of contemplative lethargy, during which her whole being seemed to her to be stretched out, extended, till it was like something very fragile and thin that, almost as a mist, permeated great spaces. Faintly, very faintly and vaguely, she felt that she belonged to the inn and the garden, to the olive slopes, to the little town there below her, to the open space and the calling children, to the valley sleeping in a golden haze, to the delicate lines and folds of the ranges of hills, to the naked and barbaric flanks of the Sabine mountains.

Magna Peccatrix. But how can any sinner be great, or any sin? Both surely were small as those children moving, almost like hurrying insects, in that space hemmed in by tall houses.

Dolores had taken a step that was fateful. She was on her way perhaps to ruin, certainly to sin. And she was not a bad woman. She ought, no doubt, at that moment to have been in a condition of febrile excitement, 'strung up,' lashed by mad impulse, carried away into some region in which all values were changed.

But she was not. On the contrary, now that she was alone, her normal amount of feeling seemed lessened. Presently she felt almost sluggish, like—she fancied—one of those Italian women who, with crossed arms and staring eyes, lean for ever upon the sills of windows looking into the street.

But she looked not into the street but into the world, this great world of woods, of slopes, of valleys, plains, hills, mountains, that was only a minute fragment, almost infinitesimal, of the whole.

As the afternoon waned her eyes did not wander any more over the mighty landscape. The children's playground held them. Life seemed to concentrate itself in that small space hemmed in by dwellings, where the little forms ran and leaped, and the little voices sent forth their shrill cries of happiness and energy. What are women meant for? she thought. And there came, like a sign, through the silver-green olives the answer, 'To give life—to hand on the torch—to people the playgrounds of the world.'

When the evening was falling Cesare returned, coming up by the slope below the long pergola. The white cat accompanied him on to the terrace, lifting her tail, arching her back, walking on tiptoe, and pressing against his legs, her yellow eyes dull of a musing desire.

'You are rested?' he said.

'Yes, quite.'

'I think it must be dinner-time.'

He looked towards the inn, and saw the broad form of Erminia moving in the sitting-room.

'Yes, she's laying the table. Nobody has disturbed you?'

'No.'

'You see, I chose well for us.'

'Chose!' she said.

'Yes, when I thought of Olevano and Casa Truschi.'

Erminia tinkled a bell. They walked towards the house. Soup was smoking on the table between the Holy Father and the cardinal. Although artificial light was not yet necessary a lamp was lighted, and shed a dusky yellow glow over the vase of pink roses. The door into the bedroom was carefully shut. Dolores sat at the cardinal's side of the table. Cesare at the end, with his back to the post-impressionist's vision of spring and of love. He helped the soup.

That evening he felt it impossible to make conversation. To do that would be to treat Dolores as a casual acquaintance. They, he and she, were surely beyond the impotent regions. He scarcely spoke. And he never felt the silence

to be awkward. The dinner was a bad one. He noticed that fact and had no wish to apologise to Dolores. What did it matter on such a night as this?

Erminia poured out red wine, 'Vino del Paese,' into the thick glasses. Her feet were noisy on the uneven bricks as she went, rather heavily, to and fro. Benedetto passed below on the terrace, and the strong, raw smell of the black cigar he was smoking penetrated into the room. Bells sounded in the hidden town. Was it the Angelus ringing? No, surely it was too late, and the hour of the Angelus was gone with the warm, bright day. The red wine was thin, but not disagreeable, rather sweet. Perhaps Benedetto had opened a special bottle. Cesare noticed that Dolores did not touch her glass.

'Aren't you going to try the wine of the country?' he asked her.

'No.'

'But Benedetto will be quite hurt if you don't.'

'Benedetto?'

'Our landlord.'

'I don't want to hurt his feelings, but I don't care for any wine to-night. Is it good?'

'Not bad.'

Erminia brought in the veal. Cesare was not very hungry, but he ate quickly. Dolores ate very little.

Night fell. The dinner was finished. Only a plate of oranges remained on the table. The little room looked different now that the light of day had left it. The women in ruffs who were arranged on the wall behind Dolores seemed to regard Cesare with a stronger expression, a slightly greater intelligence. Dolores glanced up and met the eyes, the sad eyes, of the Holy Father. She thought of him, a prisoner in his immense palace beyond the curving line of the hill which shut in the view from the terrace. She wondered if, in his many prayers, he often prayed for poor women. Then she thought of the *Madonna del Buon Consiglio* at Genazzano. She had not visited the Madonna. The Madonna would not offer a prayer for her soul to-night.

'Have you quite finished?' said Cesare.

'Yes, quite.'

'Shall we go out? Then Erminia can clear away. I

dare say she and her father go to bed early. Or perhaps he goes down to the town at night.'

'Yes, let us go out.'

She got up.

'Don't you want a wrap?'

'Oh no, I don't think so.'

She went to the balcony and stood by the rail for a moment, looking very tall, very slight. Cesare watched her, standing in the room. She turned.

'No, it 's quite warm.'

She descended the steps. Erminia appeared by the door at the back of the room.

'You can clear away,' said Cesare. 'The lady won't want anything more to-night.'

'Eccellenza, sì.'

He looked at her. Then he said:

'Do you lock up at night?'

'*Come vuole.* Nobody comes up here.'

'It isn't necessary, of course. *Meglio così.*'

He went out.

Erminia cleared away slowly, shook out the cloth, spread it again over the table, set the lamp on it, went out to the back regions, and shut the door behind her.

Very late that night, when Olevano slept profoundly, a gleam still shone from the inn, but not from the sitting-room window. It was seen by a man who very slowly, and as if weak or oppressed, made his way in the gentle starlight up the slope that led from the road by the cypresses, to the long pergola beneath the balcony of Dolores' bedroom. Before starting on his walk up the hill this man had written and despatched a letter to a woman, addressing it to a palace in Rome, and putting in one corner the words '*Far seguire.*'

The night was still and undisturbed by any wind. The air was warm on the lower slopes of the hills, but grew fresher as the man ascended. But he did not notice this fact. He did not look at the dim outlines of the mountains. He did not look up at the stars. His eyes were bent on the ground, or roved around searching for the way, until they perceived the light in the inn. Then they fixed themselves steadily on that.

It was just after one o'clock when the man drew near to the lower walk of the inn garden. Before entering the garden he paused, and gazed up at the light. It shone faintly, but steadily, from the French window which gave on to the balcony of Dolores' bedroom. This window was a little way open, and was protected by a green shutter. The light shone through the aperture, not through the shutter. But almost immediately after the arrival of the nocturnal wanderer and his prolonged pause not far from the window, it was pushed more widely open, and the figure of a man came out upon the balcony. He stood looking out to the night, and the man among the olive-trees near by, motionless and unseen, stared up at him. Then he turned, spoke to some one in the bedroom behind him, went in and closed the French window.

As soon as the window was shut the man standing outside moved less cautiously, and as if with a renewal of strength of purpose, forward into the garden, and arrived at the entrance to the pergola where Cesare and Dolores had sat in the afternoon. He kicked his foot against the stone bench, bent, felt it with one hand, and sat down upon it leaning his back against the wall. He was close to the entrance of the pergola, and beneath the French window and the balcony, but divided from them by the narrow descending path which was nearly level with the pergola roof. When he was seated he sighed, took off his soft hat, laid it down on the bench beside him, then felt in his hip pocket, found something, drew it out, and laid that also down on the stone, very carefully and gently. This done, he sat still for a very long time with his head slightly bent, apparently listening, or waiting for something. Under the pergola it was dark and perfectly silent. There was not a sound in the night.

Presently, somewhere far away, a bell faintly sounded the hour. It was two o'clock. The man slightly shifted on the stone. His head drooped forward a little more. And again he sighed profoundly. Then he put forth his hand and felt for an instant at the object he had taken from his hip pocket and laid so carefully beside him. Satisfied apparently, he removed his hand and dropped it on his knee. Then again he was perfectly still, as if attentively listening for something. Nearly another hour passed by without

incident. Then suddenly the man started violently, and uttered a hoarse exclamation in a harsh and almost shrill voice. A white cat had stolen into the pergola and had rubbed against his legs. In a moment he had seized and strangled it. Then he fell back, breathing heavily. Far away the bell sounded three. And directly afterwards there came from above the grating sound of a badly fitting window being pushed open. The man in the pergola wiped his face and his hands with a handkerchief, got up, took hold of the thing he had laid on the bench, lifted it, and moved to the entrance of the pergola.

There was the sound of a shot. He fell, dropping the pistol.

Dolores came out upon the balcony, stood—moved in—a flash of white in the light from the lamp—and came to Cesare, who was in the act of leaving the sitting-room by the balcony that led to the outside staircase. She caught his arm.

'You heard?'

'What was it? Where did it come from? Was it——?'

'A shot—the pergola under the window.'

'Hush! From the pergola?'

'Yes.'

They stood looking at each other. No one stirred in the inn. Benedetto and Erminia, sleeping at the back, made no sign.

'I must go to see what 's happened, who it is!'

His face was sternly grave, troubled.

'Yes.'

'But——' he paused.

'I'll come with you!' Dolores whispered.

'No.'

She clung to his arm. Very quietly he took hold of her hand. And his was firm, warmly protective.

'Carissima—wait! In a moment I'll be back. Don't stir, unless you hear any one coming in the house. If you do, go back to the room, turn out the lamp, get into bed, pretend to be sleeping. Hush! Zitto!'

He dropped her hand and disappeared in the darkness.

Dolores remained where she was. She was shaking. Bending her head forward she listened. What seemed to

her an immense time went by slowly. The inn was always wrapped in silence. Benedetto and his daughter had not stirred. At last she heard what sounded like a creeping footstep outside, and Cesare re-entered the room. Dolores sprang to him. He put his arm round her and drew her into the bedroom. She looked at his eyes.

'Oh, what is it? Who——'

'Hush!'

He made her sit down on the bed.

'It 's a suicide.'

'Under the pergola?'

'Yes.'

'That man—the landlord?'

'No.'

His face frightened her. She drew close to him, with a strange deeper feeling of horror.

'It 's Montebruno!'

'Montebruno! Here!'

'It 's he!'

'And he 's——?'

'Dead—there on the path.'

She said nothing. Her white face looked for a moment completely stupid.

'He 's dead. Nothing to be done for him. But—you!'

He put his hands to his head, took them away.

'I must get away immediately,' he whispered. 'Before anything is discovered. It must never be known I was here with you to-night.'

'No, no. Oh, but——!'

'Wait—wait! I 'm thinking about you, your position to-morrow—no, to-day, when he 's found. You must get back to Rome to-day, very early, before the authorities are fetched from the town. You must be gone before they come, if possible.'

'How? How?'

'You 'll have to go back in my motor.'

'But——'

'My man will drive you. He 'll never speak. He 's always been with me. I 'll send him early, with a letter for Bene——. No, wait! That won't do! *Gran Dio!*'

'Let me go now! I 'll go now!'

'No! No!'

'Yes, I'll go now! I can't stay here with—him. I'll go now!'

She tried to spring up. He held her down on the bed.

'Dolores!'

She yielded, trembling violently.

'If you go away now you'll be ruined. It is I who must go.'

'But I can't——'

'You must. Unless——'

Suddenly he seized both her hands.

'Unless you will face it all, let it all be known, let me stay till the dawn, protect you——'

An expression of horror distorted her face.

'Never! Never!'

She drew away her hands.

'I'll stay alone here. I'll stay. He—he meant to ruin me.'

'He?'

She pointed to the window.

'What do you mean?'

'He always made me afraid.'

She shook more convulsively. Her teeth chattered. He tried to put his arm round her.

'No, no! Don't touch me now!'

'Then'—his low voice was almost stern—'you must do this.'

'Anything—anything you tell me!'

'When I go you must get into bed. Try to rest. Keep the window open.'

'Yes, anything, anything!'

'Directly you hear Benedetto moving, directly he finds the body, and you hear him call out go to the balcony. Speak to him before any one else can. You know nothing. But when he tells you, make him understand that you must get away, that you can't be mixed up in such a thing, that he's not to go to the town till you are gone. He'll understand. And—you must tell him he will have money.'

Dolores felt physical nausea.

'I'll settle it with him later. It's the only thing to be done. Then you must go on foot down the slope till you

reach the road. The motor shall fetch you. My man shall be there. Go back to Rome at once.'

'My things!'

'Can you carry the dressing-case with you?'

'Yes! Yes!'

'Give me the bag now. I'll take it with me. And my man will manage about it. Don't think of all that. Trust to me.' He touched her sleeve. 'You must get this into the dressing-case.'

'Yes! Yes!'

'And now——'

'My things! My things!'

Cesare went to the window, and stood there in silence looking out towards the pergola under which lay the corpse of Montebruno, while Dolores thrust into the bag the few things she had brought with her from Rome. He did not offer to help her. He did not look at her. Something within him told him just then to let her alone. His dark face was grim and set. At this moment he was raging against the fate which had turned this night into tragedy and fear.

'They are in!'

Dolores was whispering. He turned, bent, shut the bag, took it up and tested its weight.

'Now I must go. Do you quite understand?'

'Yes! Yes!'

'I'll get back to Rome somehow. That won't be difficult. You had better get out in Rome and take the first taxicab you see to the palace. My man can pretend something's gone wrong with his machine, and that he has to make you get out and change. Tell Benedetto that I—Il Principino—shall communicate with him at once. He will understand. Now——' He made a movement to take her in his arms. She shrank back.

'But—but that woman!' she whispered.

'Woman!'

'Here in the house!'

'Benedetto is her father. He'll see to her.'

'But if she gets up first! If she finds him! What shall I do?'

'Seem to be asleep till she calls her father. Then you

must get him alone before he goes to the town. The great thing is to make him understand about the money. Then he 'll silence his daughter. But you must do that before either of them has any opportunity of talking. If I could stay and— —'

'No, no! Go now! Go!'

He moved towards her.

'No, no!' she whispered sharply. 'Not now!'

His brows came down till his eyes were almost concealed. Then he lifted the bag and left the room without another word. Dolores went to the French window and looked out. In a moment she saw the dim figure of Cesare below, walking slowly and softly, his right arm lifted, the bag against his shoulder. By the movement of his head she knew he looked up at her. He descended the sloping path till he reached the point where it turned abruptly. She shuddered. She knew that now he was close to the corpse. He did not go into the pergola, but descended to the left, and was taken by the darkness among the olive-trees.

As he disappeared from her sight Dolores felt a great horror of utter loneliness sweep over her spirit. She shrank away from the window. Behind her was the open door between the first bedroom and the sitting-room. Beyond that, she knew, was the open French window leading to the outside steps. She was almost out of doors. What protection had she against the night and—it? She saw Montebruno's blood-hot and exhausted eyes regarding her with pitiless scrutiny. She saw the wrinkles moving busily, like living individualities, on his domed forehead. She saw his hanging puckered cheeks, his drooping lips. She heard his voice out there in the darkness saying, 'There is not much room in life for pity.' And she felt sick with repulsion and dread. Yet at first she dared not go into the sitting-room to shut the window. She sat on the edge of the bed, with her hands tightly clenched, listening, waiting. Now she wished almost that she had not let Cesare go. He was ready to stay. He was unafraid of opinion, of scandal, of condemnation. Ah! but he was a man, and loved her. And she was a woman, and did not love him. How she hated, abhorred herself at that moment! She felt sick because she was alive, because such a woman was alive. The abrupt

intrusion into this high and lonely place, into this dead hour of the night, of one whom she knew, and of whom instinctively she had always been afraid: the mystery of his presence, of his inexplicable and frightful action, seemed to have shaken the soul of her out of a region of mania in which it had long been dwelling. She felt like one who by a violent blow had been not stunned, but recalled to her true self.

Her true self! Magna Peccatrix! Magna Peccatrix!

But the fear of the dead man increased upon her till she could no longer remain where she was. And, making an intense effort of the will, she stole into the dark sitting-room. The night air met her at the window like a watcher who knew what she had done. It felt at her face—surely with fingers of the blind that are eyes—as quickly she drew the window towards her, and softly secured it. Then she fled back into the bedroom. Swiftly she gathered together the things that belonged to her dressing-case. She must be ready to start directly she had spoken with Benedetto. She did her hair.

And all the time the dead man was with her, attentive to what she was doing, as if he had travelled far to keep watch about her that night. When at last she had everything ready she obeyed Cesare and got into bed. But she left the lamp burning. She had not the courage to put it out, although she knew well it would be wiser to do so. The light indicated wakefulness to any one who looked at the inn. She got out and closed the window of the bedroom. Surely through the shutters the light could not penetrate. But then, directly she had done this, she was afraid she might not hear Benedetto stirring outside in the morning. And she reopened the window a little way. She must put out the light. She realised that. But still she hesitated. She knew what the dark would bring. For nearly ten minutes she stood by the lamp always listening, always striving after the necessary courage.

Then a bird uttered a faint call outside. Instantly she turned out the lamp. Trembling she felt her way into bed, and drew the clothes about her.

If Benedetto did not come! If he were not the first person to find the body! A peasant going to work might come upon it, or see it from the slope: might go into the

town, might bring up the authorities before she could do anything. She would be questioned. There would be a scandal. She had known Montebruno. She would have to say so. She would be asked why he was there. They would think she must know. Every paper would be full of the matter. Her name, the answers she gave, everything would be published and read by every one.

Why was Montebruno there?

That was the thing inexplicable.

And why had he come to this lonely place to kill himself?

Dolores could not find a reason, but her instinct told her that Montebruno's presence at Olevano was not fortuitous, that it must be connected with herself and Cesare. She felt positive of this, and of this only. The dead man had known they were here. He had followed them, why she did not know. And then he had killed himself. Why? What could such an act have to do with herself and Cesare?

Something seemed to whirl round in her head. She shut her eyes. She lay very still. The words 'Magna Peccatrix' formed themselves in pale yellow edged with pale flame-like blue before her shut eyes. She read them diligently till a greyness fell on her eyelids, and she knew that the dawn had come.

Then she opened her eyes, and waited for the sound of steps in the inn.

The light grew stronger, revealing the bare, unearpeted chamber, the ugly lamp with a blackened chimney; revealing to the sun the dead man under the pergola. Birds chirped and presently sang. On the brick beside the bed of Dolores a sun ray pointed. But no one came. There was no sound in the house.

She longed to get up, to dress, to take her bag and fly from the inn. But Cesare had told her not to. She must obey him. He knew better than she. And controlling herself she lay still, listening, always listening.

And at last she heard the dull sound of movement somewhere within the house. It seemed to come from the back. Surely a door had been roughly opened by some one. She could no longer lie still. And she got up and crept over to the French window, stood back against the Venetian shutter, leaned forward and looked out.

After waiting for two or three minutes she heard a step outside, and saw Benedetto yawning and stretching as he came very slowly from some back region of the inn. He walked directly towards the pergola. Dolores drew quite away from the opening of the window behind the shutter. Almost instantly she heard a cry, 'Gesu Maria! Gesu Maria!' The second time it was loud. She thought of what Cesare had told her to do, went out on the balcony just as she was, leaned over, and called in Italian:

'Who 's there?'

'Gesu Maria! Madonna! Madonna!'

'Who 's there? What is it? What 's the matter?'

Her voice sounded shrill in her ears. Benedetto appeared, raising his arms.

'Madonna! Madonna!'

He came under the balcony gesticulating, with a horrified expression upon his face.

'Madonna mia!' he cried, looking straight up at Dolores with both his arms lifted towards her.

'Oh, what is it?'

'Venga! Venga!'

She hurried away through the sitting-room, trying to act without thinking. As she went she knew that she was wondering about the woman, Erminia. Why did she not come? Why had she not heard the cries of her father?

'Venga! Lei venga!'

Dolores ran to Benedetto. He seized her by the arm roughly, pulled her after him down the path beneath her window, stopped before a dark, prostrate mass, and cried:

'Ecco! Ecco una bella cosa!'

Dolores recoiled. She scarcely looked at the dead man, yet with an almost preternatural swiftness she saw him clearly. She even noticed details of his hideous appearance. She noticed the dreadful stillness of those lines in his great forehead which, when he was alive, had almost always been in movement; the length of the teeth exposed in a sort of grin, the disgusting livid colour of the hands which she remembered so well dealing the cards at the Giamarcho bridge tournament.

And she saw on the path just beyond the dead man the

white cat, which had pressed against Cesare, lying stark, with its head near the hand that had strangled it.

Afterwards she knew that it was the sight of the dead beast which had lashed her into a sort of violent determination, resembling strength.

She seized Benedetto's arm.

'Come here!' she said.

When they were out of sight of the corpse she said:

'Where 's your daughter?'

'Gone to get milk in the town.'

'Very well! Now listen to what I am going to say, and obey me strictly—strictly, you understand!'

'Signora!' said Benedetto, looking at her with a sudden amazement, which showed her that his mind had for the moment left the dead man.

'You have got to do something for me!'

CHAPTER XXXIV

A WEEK later, when all the Italian papers were still full of the suicide of Marchese Montebruno, Dolores received the following note, the envelope of which bore the postmark of Torino:

'If you continue to see Don Cesare Carelli alone, your husband will be informed that you were with him at Casa Truschi, Olevano Romano, on the night of September the twenty-second. Absolute proof of this exists, and is in my hands.—L. M.'

Dolores knew at once that this note came from Princess Manelli. She read it in the evening. In the morning, when the post had gone, she had looked quickly to see if there was a letter from Theo. On finding there was not she had left all her letters on the writing-table in her sitting-room, and had gone out to spend a long day with Lady Sarah.

Since the visit to Olevano she had felt afraid to be alone.

Indeed, since her abrupt return to Palazzo Barberini she had been perpetually encompassed by fear.

She had dreaded lest, despite all that had been done, Benedetto should speak; or that, if he was circumspect or greedy enough to keep silent, his daughter should be less wary. And other terrors assailed her. There was the chauffeur who had brought her from Rome to Olevano. What was to prevent him from gossipping? Or the authorities at Olevano might find out for themselves that she had stayed at Casa Trinchi that night and had vanished mysteriously at dawn. On the way down to the road, after her interview with Benedetto, she had met only one old man, gentle-eyed, smiling, courteous. He had offered to carry her dressing-case. She had quickly refused. But she had thanked him, forced a smile to her lips, anxious—she scarcely knew why, unless it was that at the moment she was a craven—to leave a good impression upon him.

That old man! might he not tell? Would he not be sure to tell of the mysterious *forestiera* with the burden who had come to him through the olive-trees? It seemed to Dolores impossible that her presence at the inn should not become known in the town of Olevano; that, if it did become known, the fact should not get into the newspapers in connection with the suicide of Montebruno.

Nevertheless a whole week had passed, and, so far as she knew, there had not been a hint of any woman being connected with the tragedy. Upon the body of Montebruno had been found a paper, written by him, in which he had coldly stated that his death would be self-inflicted, and that his action would be owing to his recent complete and final ruin at the Monte Carlo gambling-tables. There was therefore no question of murder in connection with his death. But the papers had voiced the general astonishment that it should have taken place where it did. A taxicab driver in Rome had stated that Montebruno had engaged him on the day of the tragedy, and had ordered him to drive by Palestrina to Subiaco. From Subiaco Montebruno had returned to Olevano in a carriage with one horse by night, after visiting the Albergo Dell' Aniene, where he had written a letter. He had paid and dismissed the driver in the road not far from the Albergo Roma. Afterwards he had been

to the Roma, but only for a very few minutes. The landlord had not known who he was. He had ordered a cup of black coffee and a glass of brandy, had drunk them quickly, and had immediately left the inn. From that moment, until his body was found at the entrance to the pergola, nothing was known of his actions.

But as the days had gone by the fear of Dolores, instead of subsiding, had increased. And she knew—had she not known from the beginning?—that it was a fear whose seat was in her own conscience. She was afraid, yes, of consequences, of a hideous publicity, of social ruin. What woman is not? But behind all the ugly, the common, fears was one greater than them—the good woman's fear of the other woman who had done the deed.

Dolores was afraid of herself. And in that terror was contained another terror, lest Theo should ever become aware of the existence of the woman who was not good.

Swiftly indeed upon the wrong action had come punishment. At once, ere the night was over, she had been plunged into the sordidness of sin. Never, even if she lived to be very old, would she be able to forget those words of her lover, spoken in darkness: 'You must tell him he will have money.'

Bribery! Was that to be the first action of the new life, that was divided inexorably from the old life of the woman who had kept herself out of the mud? And then had come the necessary plunge into lies.

Dolores had lied to Lady Sarah.

When Lady Sarah had spoken of Montebruno's suicide, and of Olevano Romano, Dolores had said, in a panic of fear, that she had never been there, and knew nothing about that region.

Afraid to remain alone, after her return to Rome she had sought out Lady Sarah. In doing so she had both dreaded, and longed after, Lady Sarah's transparent rectitude. She felt just then that she dared not meet Nurse Jennings. It seemed to her that the nurse's calm, searching eyes, if they looked upon her, must know. And she felt as if Lady Sarah were too remote from all sin to know, as if the atmosphere of simple goodness in which she habitually moved must keep her from knowledge unless she were told all the truth.

Lady Sarah had welcomed her, as she always did, warmly. She had never lost her *tendresse* for Dolores. She had never resented Dolores' reserve with her, a reserve which had succeeded that moment of revelation on the Pincio, and the few impulsive words spoken before the housewarming dinner in Palazzo Barberini. But she had felt surprise at the diligence with which Dolores now sought her out. And she had not failed to notice the peculiar terror which Dolores now evidently had of being alone.

Something was very wrong. The elder woman was sure of that. She felt agitation, turmoil, hidden distress, when Dolores was with her. But though Dolores came to her day by day they only talked of indifferent things, pleasantly, with friendliness, but without even the amount of frankness which once had existed between them. They visited sights. They lunched at the Constantino. They spent one day a long time in the Villa Mattei. But they were never really intimate during their intercourse.

Lady Sarah was very delicate in mind. She was incapable of taking action to force a confidence from any one. Sometimes, secretly, she had almost blamed herself for this. She was not sure that she did not deserve blame now. Two small incidents which occurred during the last week specially troubled her. For she thought they indicated a distress that must be connected with the very deepest things of a heart and nature.

During her visit with Dolores to the Villa Mattei—which Dolores had never before seen—Lady Sarah led her to the walk overlooking the view to the Alban mountains. They sat down together on the wooden seat against the carven sarcophagus, beneath the small trellis which there casts a patch of shade. And they talked quietly to each other. At that moment Dolores seemed less sad, less distressed than usual. The peace of the beautiful antique garden, perhaps, laid a delicate hand on her spirit. But presently she turned her head to look at the sarcophagus. 'There's something written here!' she said. 'What is it, I wonder?' And before Lady Sarah could speak she read aloud: '*Qui San Filippo Neri discorreva coi suoi discepoli delle cose di Dio.*' Instantly she got up from the seat. She made no comment on the words. But it seemed to Lady Sarah

as if she fled from them, like one disturbed, or even terrified.

The second incident which sadly impressed Lady Sarah occurred on a Sunday afternoon. Dolores and she had taken a walk on the Pincio. On their way home, as they drew near to the church of the Sacré Cœur, Lady Sarah was moved to say:

'Do you remember once, a long while ago, I asked you to come to church with me here?'

'Did you?'

'Yes. And you answered that you were obliged to go to tea at the Excelsior with Countess Boccara.'

'I remember. I was engaged to her.'

'You aren't to-day?' Lady Sarah asked, smiling.

'But she isn't in Rome!'

They were now in front of the church.

'Then won't you come in with me to-day, and hear the nuns singing?'

Dolores hesitated. In her large, dark eyes Lady Sarah surely saw a combat between opposed feelings. But at last she said:

'Very well!'

Her voice was low, and her manner strangely reluctant. Yet she mounted the steps with a quickness that seemed almost eager. And together they entered the church, took seats quite at the back, and knelt down. The service had already begun. The organ, placed in the gallery behind them, sounded softly. A calm, and a very pure music penetrated through the dim church, in which so many young hearts of children have felt their first ecstasies of aspiration, have gone forward, with reverent, yet almost amorous feet towards the ideal that ever recedes.

And then the nuns sang softly.

There were few people in the church. No one came in or went out, as often happens, disturbing the peace of worshippers. And Lady Sarah forgot Dolores, forgot the hour of her life. She was back in the past with her children, with the two girls who had died.

She was recalled by a hard, low sound. She listened. She heard it again. It was a sob, and came from Dolores, who at this moment got up quickly from her knees and,

without a look or word, went out of the church. Lady Sarah followed, and found her on the steps.

There were no tears in the eyes of Dolores. As Lady Sarah came to her she said :

'Dear Lady Sally, do please stay! I'm so sorry to have disturbed you. But the church is too airless for me. It made me feel quite ill, as if I were being choked almost. I mustn't go there again. Good-bye. I'm so sorry.'

By a movement in her long throat Lady Sarah saw that another sob was coming. She turned sharply and descended the steps.

And Lady Sarah went back to the church, and while the nuns sang softly she prayed for the soul of Dolores.

She prayed, but she did not ask Dolores why her prayers were so sorely needed.

Had she stood by Dolores now, and read the words of Princess Manelli, she would have known why.

'If you continue to see Don Cesare Carelli alone your husband will be informed that you were with him at Casa Trusch, Olevano Romano, on the night of September the twenty-second. Absolute proof of this exists, and is in my hands.—L. M.'

Dolores read the note again. Still keeping it in her hand she sat down on the sofa which was placed opposite to the Lenbach portrait. On this sofa she had sat with Cesare when he brought her home from Villa Medici.

So the shame of her life was known, and by a woman in her own world! Who had told of it? Her mind went at once to Montebruno. She read the note again and again dully. Then at last she put it down, carefully, on the sofa beside her. She was trying to consider it and her situation, but her mind fell heavy and empty. Perhaps it was affected by her body. She did not feel well to-night. That morning, when she had got up, she had been conscious of a faint and horrible nausea, but of late she had been so nervous, so excited mentally, in such a condition of apprehension, unrelenting and perpetual, that she had given small heed to her body.

Princess Manelli openly threatened her. Bribery, flight, subterfuge, lying :: such had been her portion since her visit

to Olevano. The gutter had received her. And now a sword was suspended above her head. She remembered what Cesare had told her in the garden at Cadenabbia, and she understood the Princess fully at last. The Princess had suffered terribly, and now she was near to crying out. But why did not she cry out? Why did not she place the proof of which she wrote in the hands of Sir Theodore? Why should she wait?

Dolores felt that there was a reason. She even felt that it was an obvious one. But she could not find it. And now it seemed to her that it was her curious physical *malaise* which rendered her stupid, and so prevented her from making the very simple discovery.

Was she going to break down physically because of the cruel strain she had been undergoing, a strain which this note beside her increased?

Theo would be coming back very soon. He might arrive any day now. She did not wish to be ill when he came.

How would she meet Theo?

Her physical discomfort was increasing. Or, perhaps because her mind was so sluggish, she was able to be more conscious than usual of bodily things.

'But what do they matter?' she said to herself, with a sort of anger.

What is bodily discomfort when the mind is held fast in anguish?' She looked again at the note, but without taking it into her hand.

During the days since her return from Olevano she had not seen Cesare. Directly she had arrived at the palace she had written him a short note, which she had posted herself. It contained these words:

'Don't come to see me, please, till I ask you to. I want to be quiet for a few days, and shall not receive any one. Do not answer.'

He had obeyed her. He had not come, and he had not replied. She did not even know if he was in Rome. Probably, she thought, he had left Rome, to make things safer in connection with the tragedy of Olevano. But she knew if she did not write soon again he would come. She knew the impetuosity of his nature.

Among all her miseries a small thing which troubled her was this. She had lost her latch-key to the front door of the apartment. She had last seen it when Cesare had thrust it into the keyhole on the night of their return from Villa Medici. Probably Cesare had it. She had meant to ask him about it, but in the turmoil of events in the last days she had not remembered to do so. Even when they were together at Olevano she had never thought of it. Her mind had been steadfastly fixed on one thing, almost like the mind of a maniac. And since she had returned to Rome she had not chosen to write to Cesare about it. She had feared to write such a thing lest her letter should fall into the wrong hands.

As she now sat looking down at the few words which held such a volume of meaning she realized that they not only suspended a sword over her head but raised up a barrier between herself and Cesare. And he knew that she wished such a barrier to be raised up. She knew that she did not wish to see Cesare again. That fact made her the more disgusting to herself, increased the heavy burden of her sin. But it inspired her also with a desire for action, and suddenly quickened her mind.

She got up, took the note, and went to her writing-table. Sitting down there she wrote at the top of the Princess's paper:

'Received to-day.' Then she hesitated. She was thinking of the loss of that key. After a moment she added: 'If you have kept something of mine by mistake please return it.' She put no name. But he did not try to disguise her handwriting. She thought of doing so, but the idea sickened her, and she rejected it. She enclosed the note with its additions in an envelope, addressed it to Cesare in Rome, sealed the envelope, and got up. Her intention was to go out at once and to post it herself. And she resolved that this should be her last written communication with Cesare that might not be seen safely by all the world.

Each time she did something surreptitious now it seemed to her as if she sank down a little deeper into the mud. The shock that had recalled her to her true self had given to her the good woman's capacity of moral suffering. The atmosphere in which most women capable of doing what she had done could have breathed with comfort almost suffocated

her. Her instinct was to fight her way out of it. And now, as she moved to go out with the letter, she had a strange sensation almost of relief. The first thrill of the nerves, the first shudder of apprehension over, was she not almost glad that the Princess knew? The dulness had now lifted from her mind, and she understood why Princess Manelli did not cry out, would not cry out, unless her admonition was defied. She believed no doubt that to speak would be to separate Dolores from Sir Theodore. And what then? Cesare was waiting. Dolores realised that the Princess would keep silence, perhaps for ever, unless she were driven into action. If the Princess knew that she was shutting the door upon a past which the woman whom she thought she was punishing already longed to wipe out! If she knew that she was helping the woman she hated! Then surely she would speak at once. But she would never know.

With the letter in her hand Dolores was crossing the drawing-room on her way to the door, when she was overtaken by a strange sensation of physical discomfort, this time accentuated. Her head swam. All about her the room seemed abruptly to fade. The outlines of the furniture grew dim before her eyes. The damask-covered walls swayed as if they had no solidity, and were played upon by a wind.

She sank down on the sofa, mechanically grasping the letter. She felt as if the only part of her body over which she had any power was the hand that held it. And such will as she still possessed she strove to direct to that hand.

'Keep hold of it! Keep hold of it!' her mind was saying to the hand as she let her head fall against the back of the sofa. She shut her eyes, remained still, and found herself thinking of Nurse Jennings.

'I want Nurse Jennings! I want Nurse Jennings!'

Now the voice in her mind was saying that. She had quite forgotten the hand and the letter. Her instinct was going to be justified. It had been a prophetic instinct. She was going to have some severe illness. No one but Nurse Jennings would be able to help her through it. If only the nurse were with her now! If only she could get to the bell, summon Carlino, send him in search of the nurse! Faintness increased upon her. She felt herself

enveloped by it as by a garment. Then it died away—or fell away—from her. The turmoil of her brain subsided. She opened her eyes. They met the eyes of the old man in the portrait. She sat up. She stared at those painted eyes, consciously seeking a message from the soul which she had always felt to exist behind them. Knowledge seemed trembling at the threshold of her mind, feeling for an entrance door with hands a little vague, though the knowledge itself must be surely tremendous. And the old man regarded her with his expression of intense and almost horribly complete intelligence. And his eyes now said to her, 'What? You do not know your own secret?'

'My secret?' she thought. 'My secret?'

The faint and sickly sensation crept about her again. But she did not sink into the cloud. The walls did not sway. The outlines of the things about her remained distinct. And she kept her eyes on the eyes of the old man, till those feeling hands found the door. It opened. And, like a wave, a certainty entered, flooded her heart and her brain. She had believed knowledge was at the door. No, this was not knowledge, hard knowledge. Impossible that it could be that. It was the mystical certainty of a woman, and seemed far more wonderful than knowledge to Dolores.

The old man had waited, and now it was to be! Reward or punishment! How would it come upon her when all the days were accomplished and all the sufferings endured? How ought she to feel? Did conscience speak? Where was the moral sense? Was it active? Was it searching her out like the surgeon's knife in a shrinking body?

Magna Peccatrix! Magna Peccatrix!

She thought of the words, but they seemed to mean very little or nothing. Her own blindness, her own forgetfulness, now almost coldly astonished her. But she had walked in nightmare ever since that shot had rung out under the pergola at Olevano. She had been astray in a world of abominable shadows. But what a reality was she now approaching!

'Yes, yes,' she looked at the old man. 'You have waited. You will not have to wait much longer.'

She must have moved her hand. For the paper of the note on the sofa made a slight noise. And she remembered what she had been going to do when the sensation of illness

overcame her. She had been going to post a letter to Cesare Carelli.

A tide of red went over her face, ebbed, flowed again. She took up the letter, laid it in her lap, looked at the address. And as she looked she tried very consciously to go back, to return upon her steps, to feel exactly as she had felt when she had written in it. But she could not. All values seemed displaced. She asked herself whether now she could post that letter, what attitude she was to take towards Cesare, what was to be her future conduct. She felt terribly excited, and unable to judge properly of anything because she was irretrievably concentrated on one tremendous thought. She was no longer afraid of herself, as she had been ever since the episode at Olevano. It seemed to her just then that she was unable to be either afraid or unafraid. She said to herself, 'Long ago I knew this would be. Long ago I foresaw this.' But she felt that she had never known or foreseen it. The shock of surprise was as intense, as overpowering, as if no strange and guiding conviction, no unavowed purpose, had ever led or moved her.

Carlino knocked at the door between the two drawing-rooms. She did not hear him. He knocked again more loudly, and then entered with something on a salver. He came quite close to Dolores before she realised that any one was in the room with her. But she did not start. She only stretched out a hand that was now very cold and took the telegram he had brought. And as she took it she said to herself, 'Theo.'

As soon as Carlino was gone she opened the telegram and read:

'Business much involved, obliged stay on perhaps three or four weeks.—THEODORE.'

Three weeks more without Theo, without being obliged to meet his bright and critical eyes! She was conscious of a sense of relief. But if Theo did not return, if it were known that he was not in Rome, would not Cesare be almost sure to come to the palace? She must go out and post that letter. Then surely he would not come. He would not dare to risk bringing social ruin, domestic ruin, upon her.

It was getting late. She postponed the hour of dinner,

put on her hat and went out with the letter. She walked all the way to San Silvestro to post it, moved by a childish fancy that it would go more safely from there than from any smaller post office. Then she took a fiacre, and ordered the driver to go to an address in Vicolo Carcano outside Porta Salaria. Nurse Jennings was there at this time, attending a nervous case, an Italian lady whom Dolores knew. The horse, a thin and lethargic animal, probably half-starved, went almost at a walking pace. It was dark night when they reached the big house, which stood high, with a private road around it. Dolores rang and asked for Nurse Jennings, after inquiring if the mistress of the house were better.

'Much better, Eccellenza. The nurse is leaving to-morrow,' said the young footman with a smile.

He asked her to walk in, but she refused, and remained standing at the door while he went to fetch the nurse. Since he had spoken she had come to a sudden decision. If Nurse Jennings were really free to-morrow, and had no other case in hand, she, Dolores, would ask her to come away for three weeks, till Theo returned from England. What a relief it would be to get out of Rome, to be in some lovely quiet place with that woman of calm, common sense, clear-eyed, cool-brained, capable. Dolores' fear of Nurse Jennings had left her since the event of that afternoon.

In the distance of a large and dimly-lit hall she saw a figure moving rather softly, and with a certain firmness that suggested character, towards her.

'Lady Cannynge, is that you? There now! What is the matter?'

The steady eyes searched Dolores' face. But the light was very dim at the door.

'You wouldn't have come all this way for nothing, I know.'

'Is it true that you are leaving to-morrow?'

'Yes. The Countess is getting along splendidly now.'

'Will you do something for me?'

'I'm sure I would be very glad to. What is it?'

She leaned forward a little.

'You're not ill?'

Dolores, moved by a strange impulse, put her face close to the nurse's.

'Tell me, do I look ill? Different?'

'My goodness! But any one would think you wished me to say yes!'

'I only want the truth.'

Nurse Jennings studied the face of Dolores for a moment. Then she said:

'There isn't much light here to go by. But you don't look to me quite natural. And what is it you want?'

'My husband is in England for three weeks. I want to go away, but I won't go alone. If you are free will you come with me, just for three weeks?'

She laid her hand on the nurse's arm.

'I want you, I want you very badly to come.'

'I'm glad to think it, I'm sure, Lady Cannynge.'

She paused.

'Well, I don't see why not,' she said. 'It would be quite a treat. And where should we go?'

'I'll think, to-night. You will come then? You promise?'

'Well, I should like it. And I don't see why not. But to-morrow would be rather quick work, wouldn't it?'

There was a faint sound of caution in the nurse's voice.

'Let me come round and see you to-morrow, and talk it over. And, if we do go, we might start the next day.

'Very well. Good-bye, nurse.'

'Well, but wait a minute, Lady Cannynge. You haven't told me why you came here!'

'I want you to come away with me.'

'But how could you know I was leaving here to-morrow? Didn't the man tell you at the door?'

'Yes.'

'Well then——!'

'I wanted to see you. I felt I must see you. It doesn't matter what I wanted. Good night, nurse!'

She got into the fiacre and drove away.

When she reached home, and was eating her small dinner with scarcely any appetite, she considered where they should go. She was sure that the nurse would consent to go with her. It seemed to her that the choice she was about to make was very important. Her head was now clear, but she still felt unwell. And a sense of unrest gnawed her.

She would not lose it till she was away from Rome. When dinner was finished she went to the drawing-room. Where should they go? Capri, Sorrento, Amalfi? No, no. Perugia came before her mind with its soft and almost tender view, those long lines of Umbrian hills which suggest the lives of the saints. And mentally she rejected Perugia. That region was not for her. She remembered the words she had read in the garden of Villa Mattei, she remembered the voices of the nuns in the church of the Sacré Cœur. And she dared not seek at this moment the country of the saints.

'I will leave it till to-morrow,' she thought.

As she lay awake in the dark the conviction which possessed her was like a personality companioning her. She had prayed when Denzil was dying, but she had not prayed to-night. When at last sleep began to approach her, she seemed to be again on the high terrace at Olevano, to hear rising up over the slopes and the crested olive trees the voices of children, to see darting tiny shapes before her in an open space hemmed in by houses.

And presently, as she was sinking down into the gulf of sleep, she heard the sighing whisper that had come to her through the olive trees:

'To give life—to hand on the torch—to people the playgrounds of the world.'

CHAPTER XXXV

In the morning the fever of desire to be gone from Rome burned more strongly in Dolores. From moment to moment she dreaded the arrival of Cesare. If he were in Rome that letter posted the night before had reached him. On an ordinary man it would act as a shackle, keeping him from Palazzo Barberini. But Cesare was not an ordinary man when his passions were roused. She realised now, in the light of morning, that instead of deterring him from visiting her, the Princess's warning might spur him into some immediate and violent action. The impression made upon

her by his recklessness after the dinner at Villa Medici was not effaced. He had wished that night to provoke a scene with her husband. What might he not wish now? But he must follow her desires. After what had occurred he was bound by the law of honour to submit himself to her in any matter affecting her reputation. She called in Carlino, and told him she was expecting a visit from a lady, the nurse who often came. She was not *in casa* to any one else. Carlino, looking very serious, quite understood. As he said so he fixed upon her his large and rather sad eyes. And Dolores was uneasy. Hastily she said:

'Va bene, Carlino!'

When he had turned away she was conscious of a sense of distinct relief. She had been overtaken by the feeling that she was transparent. And that feeling was often to be with her in the days that were at hand.

But though she had given that order to Carlino she was not at ease. She was sure Cesare had kept her latch-key. What was to prevent him from using it? He ought not to use it. Perhaps he would not dare to. But she could not feel sure of anything in connection with him. A love as violent as his might carry him beyond all conventions, might induce him to break through all bonds. If only Nurse Jennings would come! As she sat in the drawing-room Dolores listened perpetually for sounds in the hall. She had set the doors that divided her from the hall wide open, lest she might be taken unawares by Cesare.

To-morrow she would leave Rome, whether Nurse Jennings came with her or not. And she would stay away until her husband's return. How she would meet him she knew not. Just now she dared not think of their meeting. Perhaps she would find ways to tutor herself, to arm herself when she was away from Rome. She tried to fasten her faith upon the period of three weeks which divided her from the moment when she would have again to take up what would seem her ordinary life. How she would strive during all that time to regain control of her mind, to learn to dominate her heart, and so to obtain outward self-confidence, lest the envelope should betray the contents of the letter it held. It was between two and three o'clock when Nurse Jennings arrived, looking strong, healthy, calmly self-con-

fident, as if she were suckled perpetually at the breast of Mother Nature.

As Carlino was going away after showing her in Dolores reminded him of her order.

'I am not *in casa* for any one. I don't care who it is.'

'Sissignora!'

'You quite understand.'

'Ma, si!' returned the child in a plaintive voice, and almost with an air of being offended.

'Grazie, Carlino,' said Dolores. 'I know I can always have confidence in you.'

Carlino's face lightened, and he went out not without self-importance.

'And are you in the same mind, Lady Cannynge?' inquired Nurse Jennings, sitting down opposite to Dolores, and looking at her with very frank scrutiny.

'About going away—yes. I should like to go to-day. You are coming?'

'Well, I came round to talk it over, as I said I would last night.'

'Talk it over! But will you come?'

She got up, went to the window, did something to the curtain that hung by it, and came back.

'Are you coming? That's what I want to know.'

'And if I don't?'

'Then I shall go away by myself to-day. I shan't wait till to-morrow. I need a change at once.'

'Where would you go to?'

'I can't make up my mind.'

She frowned.

'But do you want to go far or near?'

'Far—far!'

'What, for only three weeks!'

'It needn't be very far. I don't mean hundreds and hundreds of miles, of course.'

There was a sound of intense nervous irritation in her voice. Nurse Jennings scrutinised her more closely, almost severely.

'But tell me, please, will you come or not? Then I can decide where to go.'

'Yes, I will come. I shouldn't care for you to go

off all alone,' said Nurse Jennings, but almost with coldness.

'Oh, thank you, thank you, nurse! I—it would be so ghastly to go all alone.'

For an instant Dolores looked almost happy. She sat down.

'Now, where shall it be?'

'I must leave that to you, of course. I suppose you have some preference.'

Dolores was silent for a moment. She looked down. The nurse watched her closely.

'I want it to be beautiful,' Dolores said, still looking down. 'And quiet. It must be very quiet. I wonder what is the most beautiful place within reach of Rome.'

Nurse Jennings reddened very slightly under her freckles, and a faintly self-conscious expression came into her face. She raised and depressed her light-coloured eyebrows several times, and twisted her nose almost like a child. Then, clearing her throat, she observed:

'How d' you mean within reach, Lady Cannynge?'

'Well, not more than twenty-four hours away.'

'I have heard——'

'Yes?'

Dolores glanced up.

'I have heard—a patient of mine, one who had travelled too, told me once the most beautiful spot on earth was Taormina.'

'In Sicily!'

'Just so, Lady Cannynge.'

'Did he really say that?'

'Well, I 'm sure! However should you know it was a man?'

'I do know.'

Nurse Jennings reddened more.

'But I expect that 's much too far?' she said. 'And I dare say you 've seen it.'

'No.'

'And it may be very hot.'

'Tell me—will you be very happy if I take you to Taormina? Will you?'

'Well, I must say it is my dream to get there—Lady Cannynge.'

'We will go. We'll start to-morrow. It takes less than twenty-four hours.'

As she spoke a burden seemed for a moment to be lifted from her heart. Her pale face brightened, then suddenly changed, became set, drawn.

'What is it Lady Cannynge? Why, whatever is the matter?'

'Don't you hear——'

She got up. Bending down she whispered quickly:

'Nurse, I'm going to my bedroom. If any one comes in now, at once, say I can't see any one. Say I am ill, gone to lie down. It's true!'

'You do look——'

'Say you're a nurse! Say that! But not a word about our going away to-morrow!'

She left the room by way of the library. As the library door shut behind her Nurse Jennings heard a distant sound of voices, and almost immediately Carlino entered, looking very disturbed. On seeing Nurse Jennings alone he stared.

'What is it?' said the nurse, attempting Italian with a touch of the brogue.

'Where is the signora?'

'She's in her bedroom lying down. She's not well. Non sta bene! Non sta bene!'

'There's a signore who says he must speak to her, a signore who has been here before. I can't get him to go away.'

'I'll get him.'

Nurse Jennings walked into the hall, and found Cesare standing there. He looked at her with fiery eyes.

'Do you wish to see Lady Cannynge?'

'If you please,' he said, with a sort of hard obstinacy.

'I'm sorry you can't.'

'But——'

'Nobody's to. Lady Cannynge is unwell.'

'The servant didn't say so.'

'I say so. I am a nurse, fetched in to attend to Lady Cannynge.'

Cesare's face changed.

'A nurse! She is ill? What is it? Is she very ill?'

'She needs complete rest. And I mean to take care she has it. That 's what I 'm here for.'

They looked at each other for a moment. Then Cesare took up his hat.

'I 'll write,' he said, in a very low voice.

He bowed to Nurse Jennings, opened the door, and was gone.

Two days later, towards noon, Dolores and Nurse Jennings, with but little luggage, and no maid, got out of the train at Giardini Station, and drove up the long hill, by the Duke of Bronte's garden, and by Santa Caterina, through the Messina Gate into Taormina. The Hotel Timeo had just opened its doors after the summer sieta. They put up there, in the rooms with a private terrace over the smoking-room on the top floor.

And Nurse Jennings entered into her dream.

She had always had what she would have called 'a great liking' for Dolores. But now Dolores had won her for ever. Without a word of explanation, without an attempt at forcing her confidence, Dolores had understood the way of her heart, had almost eagerly enabled her to realise a romantic desire. For beneath Nurse Jennings' sturdy independence there lurked a strain of romance. On the day when they came to Taormina the two women drew nearer to each other. The nurse in her delight did not fail to realise the deep trouble of her companion, though she had not been enlightened further as to its cause. And Dolores, in her strange, and now very still, sadness, sympathised with the other's joy.

When the streak of blue sea divided her from Italy she was conscious of a great change in her feeling. She passed into a region devoid of events, except of those which occur in the heart and the imagination. No one knew where she had gone. She had said at the palace that she would send her address when she wanted her letters. Cesare had not written yet. Theo did not know of her departure from Rome. A sense of freedom encompassed her. She was liberated for the moment from the prison of action and let loose in the immensity of thought. It seemed to her, just at first, that she sank into rest. Horrors dropped away in

this world of beauty. The serpent gave no sign of its presence in this Eden. The stillness of sorrow was almost like joy because it was still. The garden of Villa Medici, the terrace of Olevano Romano—they were in a far country, where people loved greatly and greatly suffered, where they were driven by the Furies, where they were the prey of Life that was a devouring beast for ever unappeased. But, here, far countries sank away into legend, and, here, the Furies profoundly slept, under shadows cast over them by roses in a region of dreaming blue.

On the day after their arrival, despite the heat, Nurse Jennings started out very early in the morning to 'look about her.' She returned at half-past twelve in a state of enthusiasm. She had been to the Greek Theatre, had visited the antiquity shops and the Badia Vecchia, 'The Piazza,' the garden of San Domenico. She had even been on donkey-back up to the ridge between Mola and the Castello.

'And I've found a place for you, Lady Connynge,' she exclaimed, as they prepared to go down to lunch.

'I shall be satisfied with the theatre and the terrace here.'

'But if you ever want to be hidden away from every one.'

'What have you found?'

'I'll show you this evening after tea, when you're quite rested and it's not so hot. My freckles will be worse than ever to-morrow, I expect. But who cares?'

'There is nobody here who is likely to criticise us.'

'Oh, I don't know that! You never saw anything like the eyes all down the main street!'

'I don't think I shall mind those eyes.'

That evening Nurse Jennings, true to her promise, took Dolores to a mountain garden, hidden away in a cleft of the hills to the right of the path to Mola. It was not large, and was constructed in terraces, the last and longest of which was divided by a wall overgrown with roses from the stony bottom of a gully. Orange and fig trees, pepper trees, the eucalyptus and the almond tree, gave to it their shade. On the lowest terrace a fountain played in front of a rose-covered arbour. And nestled under a great grey stone wall above was an open pavilion, with a sloping red roof and brick columns, facing a far off view of the sea and the magical coasts of Calabria. Round the sides of this pavilion ran a

bed from which masses of wild maidenhair ferns lifted their fairylike heads. Roses clung round the columns. Roses and *barba di Giove* streamed over the roof. Steeply, on the far side of the gully, rose the uncultivated mountain side, covered with cactus, and with grass now scared by the heat of summer. An old aqueduct closed in the garden where the gully narrowed. In front, long slopes covered with olive and almond trees, with vines, and with fruit trees, led gradually down to far-away bushes of wild oleanders that nodded over the clear crystal depths of a sea all silver shot with pale blue where the rocks protected it, and where it slept by the shallow shore. And above, in the quivering sky, like a thing disdainful of earth, yet bound for a time to earth's topmost peak, Mola soared towards the sun.

For the sun had not yet departed, though already the light of evening lay over the little garden.

Only the Sicilian gardener was there. He welcomed the two strangers with a hospitable smile, and assured Dolores that his absent padrone would be willing for them to enjoy the garden. He led them with pride to the pavilion, brought them comfortable basket chairs, promised them that the fountain should always be set playing when they were there, and then disappeared to a hidden terrace, leaving them to watch the coming of twilight over the sea.

'Well, what do you say now, Lady Cannynge?' asked Nurse Jennings, with the air of a discoverer.

'I have nothing to say,' said Dolores.

She could just hear the whisper of the fountain.

'But I know I shall come here every day,' she added presently.

'I would!' said the nurse. 'Do you know, I think my fr—my patient that I told you of was quite right.'

'Yes, he was.'

On that first day how profoundly the Furies slept!

The visit of Cesare to Palazzo Barberini had not been discussed between the two women. Nurse Jennings had simply told Dolores that an Italian gentleman had wanted to see her, that he had been made to understand it was impossible, and that he had gone away. He had said he would write.

His letter must surely be lying now on a table in Rome.

As the first freshness of the changed mode of life faded Dolores could not put the thought of that letter away from her mind. It seemed to link two lands, two lives. She had written to Theo in England explaining her sudden departure on the ground of health, and of a desire to fill up her time pleasantly while he was away. But she had not had the courage to write to Rome to give her address. Each day she resolved to write. Each day she put off the task. More than a week had gone by. And she had not written. Then there came a telegram from Theo in London.

'Stay on Taormina I will come over and fetch you back.'

The message revived in Dolores the intention she had formed in Rome, to spend the weeks of her husband's absence in a strict preparation for her meeting with him when he returned. She was to find ways to tutor herself, to arm herself. More than a week was already gone, and what had she done? She had been sunk in a strange lethargy, the victim of reaction. She took the telegram with her to the pavilion in the garden. Nurse Jennings was walking in the hills.

Since Dolores had been in Sicily she had been feeling better physically, but the mystic certainty had never left her for a moment. Now and then, when she had met the clear gaze of Nurse Jennings, she had wondered whether the nurse was guided by any instinct to a suspicion of her conviction. She could not decide. And now was not she armed against the nurse? For she knew the way of her heart. That little fact gave to Dolores sometimes an odd feeling of safety when the nurse's eyes held a searching expression.

Nicola, the kind gardener, hastened to the lower terrace to see the little fountain playing, and Dolores went into the pavilion, and sat down on a *chaise longue*. She rested her feet against the bar of the chair. The high back supported her head. Almost directly she heard the whisper of the fountain beginning. Through the rose-covered columns she looked at the distant sea, at more distant Italy.

Theo's telegram lay on her lap.

A white sail appeared on the sea, the only speck that broke the flawlessness of the blue. Imperceptibly it moved, going from the straits where a city lay dead into the deep blue

distance. Was it voyaging to the Fortunate Isles? As Dolores watched it an intense yearning, an aching desire, stole through all her being. That little white sail, she knew not why, made her long to be happy, just to be happy and at peace, to be understood, to be cherished because she was understood. She felt that she was travelling, like that sail. She knew not the length of the journey. *Di domani no c'è certezza.* She had been in tempest and night, black night. And now whither was she going? To what port was she shaping her course?

She longed almost desperately to tell some one all the truth of what she had done. And suddenly memory placed before her a man, a priest, whom she had once seen for a moment, whom she had scarcely then been aware that she saw. He had stood on the Pincio looking towards St. Peter's on the day when she had spoken frankly to Lady Sarah. His lips had moved, perhaps in a prayer. If he were in Taormina she might perhaps make her confession to him. It seemed to her that he would never be able to feel cleaner, till she had told the truth to some one.

Theo's telegram had made her keenly alive again. The necessity to arm herself frightened her. She saw fierce mental effort in front of her. She must prepare herself for hypocrisy.

And that little sail was so white! Was that why it was permitted to voyage through the flawless blue?

Qui San Filippo Neri discorreva coi suoi discepoli delle cose di Dio. The things of God. The fingers of Dolores closed convulsively on the paper in her lap, and the telegram was torn. She threw it down on the pavement of the pavilion. And as she did so she was overtaken once more by the peculiar feeling of faintness which had assailed her in Rome. And the white sail vanished for a moment quivering from before her eyes.

'Cooee!'

A sturdy woman's voice, full and cheerful, dropped down to her from somewhere above. She did not answer. The cry came again twice. But she shut her eyes and lay perfectly still. Presently she heard steps, then again a voice.

'Lady Cannynge! Didn't you hear me?'

She opened her eyes. Nurse Jennings, her hands full of

mysterious green plants that she had picked in the hills, was standing between the columns looking in on her.

'Yes,' Dolores said, with some difficulty.

'And you wouldn't answer? Would you rather be alone perhaps? Shall I leave you in quiet?'

'No, don't—don't!'

'What is it?' The nurse stepped in. 'How yellow and drawn you look!'

She laid down the plants on a little straw table that stood by Dolores' chair.

'Lady Cannynge, is there anything wrong with you? But I know there is. Wouldn't you like to tell it to me? It might ease you.'

She did not disclaim curiosity, but if she had any Dolores knew it was the affectionate curiosity of the heart, which is the tribute of a warm and disinterested feeling.

'I am all for you,' she continued. 'And I'm sure you feel that. Dying for people is nonsense, and I don't believe in nonsense. But after what you've done—'

'What I've done!' said Dolores.

She moved, sitting straight up in the *chaise longue*.

'Bringing me to Taormina, I mean!'

'Oh—yes.'

'I shall always be glad to do my best for you—in any way.'

Dolores was silent for a minute. Then she said:

'Nurse, do sit down. Sit close by me.'

'Why not?' returned Nurse Jennings, drawing up a chair. She took a hand of Dolores in hers, and calmly held it.

'I don't feel very well. I think my nerves are all wrong. And besides—'

'What is it? If you say exactly, I dare say I can very soon tell—'

'No, I want you to tell me something.'

'Me!'

'That friend who told you about Taormina!'

'Well, I never!'

'Where is he now?'

'In England, I believe.'

'Don't you know?'

'Well, he is in England.'

'I wonder——'

'Whatever do you wonder?'

'I wonder if you will!'

'Oh—Lady Cannynge!'

'I should like you to be happy, how I should like that!'

'You are good!'

'No.'

'But why do you want me to be happy? In such a special sort of a way, I mean.'

'I think it 's because I 'm so unhappy.'

'Are you?'

'Very, very unhappy.'

'Is it always what you told me?'

'No——' Dolores looked at the white sail. 'It 's much more than that now.'

She shut her eyes. Nurse Jennings' face changed. It had been emotional. It became suddenly professional. She leaned over Dolores.

'Tell me what you 're feeling like,' she said. 'Tell me exactly.'

Dolores told her. There was a long silence.

The nurse made no comment on what Dolores had told her.

Dolores asked her for no opinion.

At last Dolores said:

'To-day, when you were out, I got a telegram from my husband. When he leaves England he is coming here to take me back to Rome.'

'Shall you wish me to go when he comes?'

'I don't think so. I want you near me. And I shall want you much more presently.'

She was silent.

'You 'll like my husband when you really know him,' she added after a moment.

'I don't know that!'

'He 's always nice to everybody.'

'Except you, by what you 've told me.'

'I feel perhaps I ought never to have told you. But I couldn't help it.'

'And why do you help it now?'

'Nobody could ever understand.'

'I don't know about understanding. But I think I know.'

'What?'

'Well—the gentleman you sent me to speak to in the hall. When he gave me a look, by that, and the way you went out of the drawing-room, I knew a good deal, I think.'

'I don't want to see him again. I don't want ever to see him again. And that very thing, my not wanting to, is wickedness now, after what I have done. And now my husband is coming here. And—and when I have to tell him——'

She broke off.

'You mean to tell him then!' said Nurse Jennings, quite simply, apparently neither rejecting Dolores as a sinner nor accepting her as a moral problem.

'I shall have to—at last. How can I help telling him?'

'But—what do you mean?'

'I shall have to tell him about—about the child. And then—nurse, can you help me? Can any one help me?'

Suddenly she broke down, and completely. Nurse Jennings went quickly to Nicola, and begged him go on an errand to the town. Then she returned to the pavilion. Before the two women went back to the hotel she knew the truth of the episode at Olevano.

CHAPTER XXXVI

After that day Dolores felt a certain sense of relief, but not because of anything Nurse Jennings had said to her. The relief came from the fact that she no longer bore the burden of her secret uncompanioned. Cesare did not know it, but only a part of it. Nurse Jennings of course had spoken words in accord with her character. She had stated certain facts. And facts had gone over the spirit of Dolores as a travelling wind goes over grass, leaving it just as it was when the world was still. Nurse Jennings soon saw that, and did not attempt any further combat against the conviction of Dolores. She had had patients with fixed ideas

before, and knew how difficult it was to 'shift' such ideas. And, perhaps, though she did not show it then, Dolores' belief had made some impression upon her.

The natures of the two women were very dissimilar, and in that dissimilarity Dolores had found the path which sustained her feet as she went to confession. Once the confession was finished, and Nurse Jennings had 'had her say,' on what she picked out at the moment as the main fact of importance, Dolores and she seemed to fall back into their habitual relations. Dolores did not treat her as penitent treats priest. And Nurse Jennings did not express any opinion on the moral question involved. That lack of expression gave to Dolores a deeper confidence in the nurse. She needed neither condemnation nor absolution from any human being just then. What she needed was acceptance, to be accepted with in her hand the gift of her sincerity. She knew the nurse accepted her. And often she remembered the simple words, 'I am all for you.'

It was perhaps that scene in the pavilion which nerved Dolores to write to Palazzo Barberini, asking that any letters should be forwarded, but forbidding the servants to give her address to any one. Italian and Sicilian posts are slow. Four days elapsed before she had any reply. Then a packet arrived. She undid it quickly, and at once saw three letters in Cesare's handwriting. There was also a letter from Theo, written before he knew she had gone to Sicily. She read Theo's letter first. How calm it seemed! She felt absurdly as if his complete ignorance of all that she knew was unnatural, as if he had sunk into childishness. But how could he know?

He mentioned the house in Lancaster Gate, and took her back into the bedroom in Palazzo Barberini. As long as she lived could she ever forget that house in Lancaster Gate, and its effect upon her destiny?

So—that was Theo!

A sensation of sad irony possessed her soul as she laid his letter down. She sat looking at the three unopened letters of Cesare. If she had done what she wished to do at that moment she would have destroyed them unopened, passing a sponge over the slate on which terrible words were written. She did not want to face the truth that she had

conjured up. She was a coward, and worse than a coward. For she had done the unforgivable thing. She had used love without returning it. And she saw Cesare now as victim rather than lover. But at last she opened one of his letters. She read it quickly and put it down. Then she opened the second.

She was sitting on the high terrace before her bedroom window. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. The heat was great. But the sky was grey. Etna looked peculiarly volcanic under that grey sky with a waveless, grey sea at its foot. No smoke was visible streaming out of the crater. And to-day the absence of smoke suggested danger to Dolores. The monster seemed to brood, with carefully covered fires, meditating some dreadful deed. And Sicily lay around it like a land stricken with fear, its radiant beauty vanished.

She read the second letter and the third. Then she sat back and looked at Etna.

Despite her knowledge of the volcano's terrific powers, since she had read Cesare's letters she felt as if the power in a fully awakened human soul made all other forces seem negligible.

How had she ever dared to use the feeling in a human soul as she had used Cesare's?

She deserved that he should punish her. Would he punish her in spite of all she could do? The terrible thing was that in his sincerity he persistently assumed hers. He took it for granted that she loved him.

His first letter was short, and expressed anxiety about her health, begged for an interview directly she was able to see any one, and in a veiled manner indicated that it was essential the interview should not be long delayed. She understood that in this letter Cesare had tried to govern himself, to attain the discretion she would wish for, to sink the passionate lover in the man of the world.

The second letter was longer and much less prudent. Almost violently he asked why there had been no reply to his first letter. He wrote that he must see her, and that unless he received an answer of some kind—a word only if she were really unwell—he should come again to the palace. He fixed the time of his delay at twenty-four hours.

And then there was the third letter, written after another visit to the palace, and his discovery of her departure without leaving any address.

Dolores sat looking at Etna, and feeling as if that third letter had scorched her like a flame from its molten breast. There was something ungovernable in Cesare. She had been aware of it more than once, terribly aware of it on the night when he had taken her back to the apartment while Sir Theodore slept. But never—not even then—had she realised it as she did at this moment. His passion might pass away. She had heard people say of the Italian character that it was full of heat but of heat that was not lasting. She did not know whether this was true. But she knew that she had roused an intensity which, though it might die away, might cause destruction before it died. She felt the fixed attention of a heart concentrated upon her. And it was like an eye that would never be weary of watching. It began to terrify her.

The third letter had evidently been written in a mood of red-hot excitement. A bitter sense of injury flamed out of it. But still the man who had written it believed in the woman's love. It was incredible to Cesare that Dolores could have done what she had done under any influence save that of passion. But evidently he suspected a sharp reaction of fear, a creeping palsy of prudence. Evidently he thought he detected great danger to his love in this reaction. And he fought against this supposed danger with an energy that was fierce. Almost as his touch, his kiss had spoken to her in the garden of Villa Medici did his written words speak to her now. But how different was her response!

In Villa Medici she had nearly been carried away by the intensity of his desire. In that moment when he had seemed all, she nothing, she had known how the desire to be needed sometimes betrays good women.

But there was a gulf fixed between that woman and the woman now sitting on the terrace at Taormina.

And never would Cesare bridge it.

There was, as he suspected, reaction. But it was reaction which had carried a nature back to its own essential truth.

And Cesare did not know the strange and mystical conviction which, almost like that grey sea down there, waveless at Etna's foot, enveloped the soul of Dolores, changing it, giving to its course a new direction, towards the region of unknown fate. Even now, in her terror of what Cesare was, of what he might do, she felt herself to be a woman apart. For out of the sin, the terror, the sordidness, must arise a flower white with innocence.

And suddenly there came to her the thought, 'Possibly this child had to be born, not for me, not for Theo, not for Cesare, but for the world!'

It was a thought perhaps fantastic, progeny of a dreaming woman carried on in the barque that no man can ever enter, the barque of the white sails that are set towards the flawless blue. But it was a thought that henceforth was never quite to die in the mind of Dolores. And it was a thought that lifted her, in the moment of its becoming, above both her sense of sin and her sense of fear.

But the grey lay above Etna, and the grey slept at its foot. And she returned into fear.

What must she do before she went back with Theo to Rome? How was she to govern the nature she had roused, to tread down into the earth the armed man born of the dragon's tooth she had sown?

Nurse Jennings, whose bedroom opened on to the terrace where Dolores was sitting, was enjoying a siesta. A very strong and active woman, and now taking an unexpected holiday, she was up early in the morning and, unwearied in sight-seeing, made expeditions each day, but always returned to the hotel to lunch with Dolores, who spent her mornings quietly, sitting with a book in the Greek theatre, or on the lower terrace of the Tuno under the palm trees. Presently Dolores got up and went to the window of the nurse's room. The white mosquito net was closely drawn about the bed. Dolores stood in the aperture of the window, and softly said:

'Nurse!'

There was no reply.

'Nurse! Are you awake?'

'What?' said a muffled voice.

There was a movement on the bed.

'Did some one speak?' said the voice, still drowsily.

Dolores stepped into the room.

'Don't move! Don't undraw the net. I'll sit down outside. I want to speak to you.'

'It 's you, Lady Cannynge! I don't know what 's come to me to-day. I feel quite heavy with sleep.'

'It 's only the sirocco. Lie still, and let me sit here for a little. The post has come, and I 've had some letters.'

'Letters! Are there any for me?'

'No.'

'Well, d' you know I 'm glad? I don't seem to want any letters and such things here. But yours! I hope they 're nice ones?'

She moved again and put her hand to the net.

'Nurse, please don't draw back the net. I 'd rather you didn't.'

Nurse Jennings lay still.

'Just as you like, Lady Cannynge!' she said.

Now her voice was quite wide-awake.

'I 've had some letters that have—they 've made me very anxious. They 've frightened me. I don't know what to do about them.'

'I 'm sorry. But it 's always a mistake to be frightened. It 's that brings things about.'

'Brings things about?'

'Brings things on to people, I believe. I 've noticed it often with patients. Be afraid of some particular illness, or some particular operation, and as often as not it comes on you.'

'I don't think I believe in all that.'

'Well! I thought you were more inclined to it than I am!'

'Once perhaps I was. But I tried to bring something about by thinking, desiring, and it didn't happen. I don't think we can do very much for ourselves, even against ourselves.'

'Can I help you about those letters?'

'You 're the only person in the world that can, I think.'

'I 'll do my best. You may depend on that.'

'You can do nothing here. But when my husband comes, and we go back to Rome, I think perhaps you might.'

She drew her chair a little further away from the mosquito net.

'When we get to Rome, do you think you could go and see some one for me?'

'I don't see why not.'

'It's—it would be the person who came to visit me when you were with me the other day.'

'Yes.'

Dolores was silent. She did not know how to go on. Although she had told Nurse Jennings much she had not told her everything. But if the Nurse were going to help her must she not tell everything?

'I have had some letters from him,' she said at length. 'He doesn't understand things. And I'm afraid, unless something is done, he might do me a great deal of harm. I'm afraid he might ruin my life utterly.'

'He shan't do that,' said the voice behind the mosquito curtain with great decision. 'Not if I can stop him at any rate!'

'I—I don't mean my social life,' Dolores continued. 'I don't really care about that. What I mean is my life with my husband.'

'Ah!'

'I suppose—I daresay any one might think, after what has happened, that my life with my husband must mean very little to me. That isn't so. It means everything. And it's that—I know quite well——'

She stopped. The trying to speak the plain truth brought its horrible meaning home to her with a clearness that hurt her like too fierce light. She felt as if she could not put that truth into words even to Nurse Jennings. And perhaps, since that conversation after dinner in Palazzo Barberini, the nurse understood everything, even what had not been plainly told.

'Nurse,' she began again, 'the person I want you to see thinks me better than I am. He doesn't understand at all how bad I am. I want you to make him understand. He—he thinks I love him. That would have been some excuse for me,' her voice became lower; 'I want him—I feel he must know that—that I hadn't that excuse. When he knows that, I think he will hate me. I am sure he must. I suppose I am hateful.'

'Don't say that.'

'Perhaps since I spoke to you that night in Palazzo Barberini you understand a little—I don't know.' Perhaps no one ever could. I don't know—now whether I can understand. But it 's done. Only—only if my husband should ever know I don't feel I could live any longer. He thinks I am a good woman.'

Suddenly she got up and went to the window.

'Oh! I don't know how I can see him again!' she exclaimed. 'I dread his coming.'

Nurse Jennings thrust aside the mosquito-net and emerged into the room, with her red hair in disorder about her flushed and freckled face.

'Couldn't you nerve yourself to tell your husband—Lady Cannynge?' she said bluntly.

'But—I told you! It 's my husband I love!'

'Then couldn't you trust him?'

'Trust him!'

'With just the truth?'

'He would never speak to me again. That 's how men are.'

And Nurse Jennings, after an instant of silent reflection, said:

'I s'pose it is how they are, God help them!'

'And I think—,' Dolores said, looking away from the nurse, 'I think I would rather, even now, that they were like that.'

Nurse Jennings gazed at her steadily. But neither wonder nor sarcasm came into the sunburnt and freckled face, only a very human tenderness.

'I don't see how your husband could help but love you,' she said.

Dolores turned round, came to the nurse and touched her shoulder.

'Save me from losing him!' she said with an accent almost of terror. 'When you get to Rome go to Don Cesare Carelli and make him understand. Try to make him forgive me, leave me alone. Only try! But—if he doesn't! If he won't!'

'Hush! Hush! Now, my dear, we 'll go to the garden and be quiet. Didn't we come here to be quiet? I've no

idea of spoiling my little holiday, I can tell you, with a lot of black fancies that for almost certain won't come to anything. Time enough to grizzle when things do happen. Now, you put on your hat and take a book, and we'll go and sit by that fountain. I do just love its odd little noise!'

And when they were in the garden Nurse Jennings, using a subtlety natural to women, whether subtle or not, turned the will of Dolores towards quietude by the speaking of one sentence only. When Nicola had duly set the fountain playing, she remarked:

'There are times in a woman's life when she doesn't owe it only to herself to keep herself from grizzling and fretting, but to some one else too.'

Dolores looked at the nurse without saying a word, but the expression in her eyes showed that she had understood, and that the words had sunk deep into the soft nest of her heart.

Did the nurse, too, believe?

At that moment Dolores felt as if her mystical belief had received the crude acquiescence of Mother Nature. She did not realise that the truest of women may deceive for a purpose connected with one whom she has learnt to love and to pity.

Dolores did not answer Cesare's letters. She dared not. What could she write that would satisfy him, still his fierce excitement? And she dared not let him know where she was. He would come over to seek her. Till Nurse Jennings returned to Rome things must be left as they were. Dolores hated to treat Cesare with what must seem to him a monstrous, an unpardonable, contempt. Still, ought he not to have some consideration for her state of fear after the receipt of the Princess's warning? She tried to think so. She even did think so. But, secretly, she pardoned everything because of his love for her. And she felt that she alone was the sinner. To protect herself from the terror of any more letters she telegraphed to the palace that nothing more was to be forwarded, that she might return to Rome any day. This done, she resolved to detach her mind from the great fear of the future. She resolved to use the time remaining to her in Sicily in preparation for something else.

She must find courage and calm. She had sought beauty, quiet, with a strange purpose which she had never told to any one, and now she was not using them. She would use them. She would give herself to them. Silently she strove to summon about her the spirits of the hills and of the sea, the spirits of the olive and almond groves, and of the still sea caverns where the red fire of the coral hides in the glassy deep. To a paradise she had come with a deliberate intention. And now she resolved to fulfil it.

She sank into stillness. But it seemed to her always that it was the stillness which precedes storm. It happened that a succession of days of sirocco came to Sicily just then, reminding her often of that winter evening when she had driven to visit the Princess Meneelli. Ever before her eyes Etna brooded with covered fires, smokeless, terrible. Now and then the grey silence that brooded about 'La Montagna' was riven by a dull and far-off detonation, the voice of the mountain speaking. Then the silence closed again. But the voice still echoed in a woman's memory. To Dolores it seemed like a voice that arose from the molten depths of the things unseen to threaten her. 'There is no debt that shall not eventually be paid to the uttermost farthing. There is no secret thing that shall not one day be known.' So the mountain seemed to speak through the still grey weather to the woman who watched it from the high terrace above the still, grey sea. And its voice was as a greater voice, using temporal means to express the eternal truths.

Three weeks had passed. And Sir Theodore was coming. He was on his way. Dolores was not sure why he made the journey to Taormina instead of meeting her in Rome. It might be because he had not yet seen Taormina. Or it might be for another reason; from a gentlemanly desire to pay a delicate attention to his wife after leaving her for several weeks on another woman's business. Theo was sometimes very careful in little things. Detail often appealed to him. This journey from Rome to Taormina might possibly be detail.

How was she going to meet him?

Now that she knew he was actually on his way, rushing towards Sicily by day and night, she could no longer control her mind. An intense nervous agitation took possession

of her. But she tried to govern it. And specially she tried to conceal it from Nurse Jennings. She showed it mainly by her sudden desire for perpetual occupation. Now she could not be still. She rose early in the morning. She accompanied Nurse Jennings in expeditions mounted on donkey back. They went together to Monte Ziretto, to the summit of Monte Venere. They descended to the sea, took a boat, visited the caves and rowed along the curving shores. And the time passed with a fearful swiftness. And the day of Theo's arrival dawned.

'He cannot know!' Dolores said to herself. 'He shall not know.'

But she spoke to herself without conviction. Now she did not feel afraid of the Princess's telling the truth. She did not feel afraid of Cesare's revealing it, by some reckless lack of caution or by some act of violence. She did not even look forward into the future, and wonder what she would do when her mystical conviction was translated into fact. What she feared was her own revelation now. How could she conceal the change in herself from Theo? How could she cover her secret as Etna covered the tremendous fires?

She looked at herself in the glass. Surely her appearance was changed. Surely the most casual eyes must see the woman she had become. And Theo's eyes had seen her for more than ten years, while she had been a good woman. A sickening dread possessed her. Since she had sinned she no longer believed in Theo's unfaithfulness to her. She felt that she had never believed in it. She knew now that if Theo had actually sinned against her he could never have taken her to Frascati, spoken of Etna to her as he had spoken.

She had ordered a carriage and had intended to go down to the station of Giardini to meet the train from Messina. But when a servant came to tell her the carriage was waiting at the door she could not make up her mind to go in it. And she called Nurse Jennings.

'Nurse,' she said, she was near to trembling, but controlled her body with an effort, 'will you do something for me? Will you go down and meet my husband?'

'Don't you feel up to going?'

Dolores shook her head.

'Wouldn't it be better to go and get it over?' said Nurse Jennings.

She spoke calmly, even cheerfully.

'Yes. But—I can't go.'

'Then I will,' said the nurse.

'Thank you. And—and say something to him. Say I'm really not very well, or of course I would have come. Explain—prepare him for—he may find me changed.'

'You must not give way, or he will.'

'It will be all right, if I just get this hour alone.'

Nurse Jennings came close to her, held her hand, gave her a kiss, and went away to the carriage. In a moment Dolores heard the sound of a whip cracking, of wheels and of horses trotting. She went down to the further of the two terraces below, and walked up and down in the sun. For the sirocco had lifted, and the sun was shining that day.

No one was there. She paced to and fro for a long time. But the movement seemed to increase her nervous agitation, and at last she went upstairs, and sat down once more on her own terrace. She sought almost frantically in her mind for some subject on which she could fix her attention. And, as people often do when they find themselves in desperate circumstances, she told herself that nothing really matters in the life of the world.

'I am nothing! It is all nothing!' she said to herself. 'It will pass away and be forgotten almost directly. Soon I shall be gone for ever. Theo too! And those who will condemn me, if what I have done is ever known, they are all hurrying into darkness. We are shadows. It doesn't matter what happens to us here! It doesn't matter at all what happens to me.'

And all the time she felt that it mattered more than anything had mattered since the beginning of the world.

She tried to re-capture the world-feeling which she had had now and then. She looked at Etna—to-day showing a plume of white smoke—and at the vast panorama of peaks, and ravines, of rock and plain and sea. 'There is the truth,' she said to herself. 'That remains—endures. Etna saw Empedocles, and is here still. In a few years I shall be dust.'

But she felt as if she were much more than Etna in God's

great scheme. And then, abruptly as it had happened before, the strange weariness and *malaise* beset her. For a moment she was overcome by a sense of remoteness, as if she were withdrawn to a great distance. She closed her eyes. And the world-feeling came to her, not in connection with nature and nature's glory, but in connection with something helpless, frail, that might be put out almost with a breath, and that, when it came, would depend on God through her. She had found what she needed. She fastened her mind upon it. She thought, 'Not for me, not for Cesare, not for Theo—but for the world!' She brooded over that thought, keeping her eyes closed. She sank down into that thought. It was like cloud and fire about her.

Down the narrow road that led to the piazza she heard cheerful noises, the determined cracking of a whip, the rolling of wheels, the trot of horses' feet. Theo was coming. But still she kept her eyes shut. And the thought had not left her even now. The noises grew loud and ceased. She heard voices—a deep bass voice that brought all her married life about her. Her heart beat quickly. But she sat still and clung now to her thought, as if that alone could bring her salvation. She heard steps on the stairs, the bass voice saying, 'Which is it?' a rather loud knock on the door. She turned her head, without opening her eyes, and tried to call, 'Come in!'

'Doloretta!'

Had she called? The door was open. She was looking at Theo's tall figure, brown hands, bright eyes, thick silvered hair. And he seemed to her new, because of her sin. He crossed the room and came out to the terrace.

'What 's this? You are ill!'

Bending down he took her hand. She looked up at him steadily, keeping her thought in her mind.

'Not ill!'

'But you 've got Nurse Jennings, and she tells me you really are not well. And if you 've brought her with you——'

'I brought her as company—chiefly.'

He sat down near her. His eyes were searching her face. She saw that, and clung to her thought more firmly, almost fiercely.

'But you do look——' he began.

He stopped. An almost puzzled expression came into his eyes.

'What?' said Dolores. 'What?'

She never took her eyes from his.

'Not exactly ill!' he said.

For a moment he seemed, she thought, embarrassed. He moved his chair round till he faced the view. And he gazed at it in silence.

'Marvellous!' he said. 'People are right. Old Newman was right, and Goethe, when he wrote "Kennst Du das Land?" here.'

Still looking at the view he repeated the first verse almost under his breath, in a muttering voice. At the end he sighed.

'Wonderful!' he said.

He turned again towards Dolores. His face had changed. It held a look of strong, very genuine emotion.

'A change from—Lancaster Gate!' he said. 'Who shall dare to say that life is not worth living? But, the worst of it is a place like this makes one—such is the eternal voracity of human nature, eh!—long for more, for other. Doesn't it? Have you ever noticed, Dolorietta, that we really are fashioned for Eternity, whatever the materialists, the atheists say? We know it in a place like this, where we are given—well, almost the ultimate beauty, and where we desire, and just in consequence of that, more, more of everything. Well, now to unpack!'

He got up rather brusquely, then stood looking down on her earnestly.

'More of everything!' he repeated.

He bent down and kissed Dolores. Then he went into his bedroom which adjoined hers. And while he unpacked, she heard him humming, "Kennst du das Land?"

CHAPTER XXXVII

THAT evening after dinner Sir Theodore said to his wife:

'You are coming to sit on the terrace? And you, nurse?'

'In a moment, Theo. I must go and get a wrap.'

'D'you think you'll need one?'

'A very light one. We'll be down directly.'

She went away followed by Nurse Jennings. Sir Theodore strolled out to the terrace and lit a cigar.

The night was warm, like a night of summer in a land of the sun.

There was no wind. Not even the lightest breeze moved the heavy leaves of the palm trees, the climbing roses that hid the columns. Far away below the murmur of the sea was just audible. Like fireflies above the water shone the torches of the fishermen, as they put out from Giardini for their toil on the deep. Just below the terrace, beyond the garden of the hotel, Sir Theodore saw a dark mass of trees. And as he stood with his hand on the rail that protected the terrace from somewhere below and beyond him the voice of a man rose up:

'A mezzanotte appunto
Si sente un gran rumore,
Sono le garrolandi la la la la
Che vanno a lavora

'Queste la via del ponte
Dove quel traditore
Venne a tradir la bionda la la la la
Con un bacio d'amor.'

Slowly the voice travelled, as the hidden singer moved on amid the trees, going towards the promontory above the sea where Goethe sat—it is said—when he wrote his wonderful song. It grew more plaintive as it grew fainter. From the lighted town spread out on the hills bells sounded. Etna, like a gigantic shadow, lifted itself towards the myriads of stars. The penetrating scent of flowers stole up from the garden below. And Sir Theodore stood quite still

watching, listening, held, body and mind, by the spell of place and of night, subjugated by Sicily.

In a room above him Nurse Jennings was saying to Dolores.

'Yes, that 's it. I will start back to-morrow. It 's better so. And I 'll make him understand. Now, my dear, don't worry. Remember what I said to you about thinking for another. It may be. Who 's to know? Trust it to me. And go down now, or he 'll be getting impatient. Men always do.'

'But you are coming!'

'No, I 'll stay up here.'

'But ——'

'No, indeed. I can tell you that this last night I shall have my own thoughts, and plenty of them.'

'I understand,' said Dolores. 'You 've had your dream.'

'Owing to you.'

'And it 's only the beginning, I think.'

'Who 's to know?'

The two women exchanged a kiss. Dolores went down. She saw Nurse Jennings no more that night.

As she came out, and shut the glass door behind her, she saw the tall form of her husband on the farther terrace, motionless. She stood for a moment watching him, and wondering why at that moment it was not to him that she felt herself traitress but to Cesare. She hesitated to approach him. He had seemed to accept the new Dolores that day. He had even, in this new environment, been much more like the Theo of old than he had been since their first coming to Rome. There had been a softness, almost a tenderness in his manner to his wife. Dolores had feared an instinctive recoil on his part. But he had seemed freshly attracted by her. He had seemed to wish to draw near to her. The prophesies of her tormented heart had been falsified.

And this fact made Theo strange to Dolores that evening. Now she went towards him, walking softly among the little chairs and under the spiky leaves of the palms. She stepped down on to the second unsheltered terrace, roofed only by the stars. And she came up to him. Without turning he said:

'What a place! I believe in Ulysses, I believe in——'

He moved and looked at his wife. 'Doloretta, depend upon it this was the Isle of Calypso. Look! Listen to that sea!'

After a moment he quoted, 'It was a scene to fill a God from Heaven with wonder and delight.' Yes, it must have been here that Calypso offered immortality to Ulysses. Calypso! What a name! And there are people who say a word can't be beautiful! But how could Ulysses go?' He paused.

'But where's Nurse Jennings?' he said, in a changed tone.

'She's not coming down any more to-night.'

'Isn't she? Let us sit down—here by the railing. One hears the wash of the sea.'

'She's decided to start back to Rome to-morrow.'

'But I don't want to drive her away. She seems a nice sort of woman, dependable, I should think.'

'I like her very much indeed. I look upon her as a real friend.'

'Well, no doubt we shall see her again in Rome. But don't let us think about even Rome to-night.'

'Theo,' Dolores said, after a silence, 'What made you come here to fetch me back? Was it because you had never seen Taormina?'

'Not wholly. Why do you ask?'

'I only wondered, a little.'

'I thought I should like to see Sicily with you after such a lot of Lancaster Gate.'

'With me! Did you?'

The sound in her voice moved him to draw his chair closer to hers. He did not know why, or even how, but it seemed to him that his wife had changed subtly. And there was something in the change which affected him, which—yes, he acknowledged it to himself under the stars—which fascinated him anew. Always she had been peculiarly feminine. But now she seemed to be of the very essence of woman, strangely appealing and yet strangely mysterious. He said to himself that perhaps the marvellous beauty of the cadre in which he found her affected his outlook upon her. But something in his heart denied it. There was surely a change. And it was a change that could not leave a sensitive man wholly unmoved.

'Are you surprised, Doloretta?' he said.

'I don't know. And—and that was your only reason?'

'That was my reason. Don't be like Elsa to-night. Don't ask too much.'

'It is a mistake to ask too much of any human being. Yes. How true that is!'

'But—could I ask you too much?' he leaned a little towards her. 'I don't think so, Doloretta. You have a look of mystery, but I don't think in all your mystery I could ever come upon a repugnant thing.'

She said nothing, but she drew her white wrap more closely about her.

'No,' he continued. 'It is quite true, I suppose, that one human being can never completely know another. But one human being can absolutely know certain things about another.'

'Certain things?'

'As for instance I absolutely know that there are some things which you are incapable of doing.'

'Yes?'

'You seem surprised!'

'When you say that we can absolutely know—!'

'Do you mean to say I don't absolutely know you are incapable, for instance, of a betrayal of trust—of my trust, let us say?'

'Oh—hark! There is some one singing!'

She got up and stood by the rail. He came and stood beside her. He took her hand.

'The Isle of Calypso!' he murmured. 'The enchanted isle.'

When the voice died away he said:

'Shall we go to the upper terrace, our own terrace?'

'If you like, Theo.'

Even her voice seemed to him to have subtly changed, to be more appealing than it had ever been before.

When they passed through her lighted bedroom to go out to the high terrace, which belonged exclusively to them, he stopped, and looked closely into her eyes.

'What—your eyes look so strange to-night, Doloretta!' he said. 'So strange! But, why are there tears in them now?'

She bent her head. She did not say a word. He drew her to him till her face was hidden against his body.

The light in Nurse Jennings' room was extinguished.

'What is it?' he almost whispered. 'But what is it?'

'Don't ask—there are so many things!'

'Have I—is it my fault? Have I hurt you? Have I?'

'Let me cry, Theo! I can't help it to-night.'

He drew her down on a sofa close to the window, and held her for a long time. And as he held her he thought:

'What have I been doing all this time? Perhaps——'

That night he returned to Dolores.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE day after Nurse Jennings' return to Rome she took a cab and drove to the palace in the Corso Umberto Primo where Cesare Carelli lived with his parents. She had not written to say she was coming, but she had quite decided that if Cesare were in Rome he would be obliged to receive her and to listen to what she had to say. She arrived at the palace at ten o'clock in the morning. As she got out of the cab an old man with a very red face and a dazed expression issued heavily from the porter's lodge on the left of the entrance, and told her to go up to the third floor. Vaguely he offered her the use of the lift. She sturdily refused it, mounted the great staircase, and rang an electric bell beside a tall door painted black. It was opened by a large manservant.

'I want to see Don Cesare Carelli, please,' said Nurse Jennings with calm decision.

The man looked at her with surprise.

'Ma——' he began.

'Is he in Rome?' interrupted the nurse.

'Si.'

'Is he in the house?'

'Si, signora. Don Cesare is in the house, but——'

'Kindly say I must see him, and give him this.'

She handed to the servant a card on which she had written 'Nurse Ida Jennings.'

'Don Cesare knows me and will see me,' she added.

The servant asked her to walk into the hall, and, still looking rather solemnly surprised and doubtful, went away with the card. After being away for several minutes he came back, and asked Nurse Jennings if Don Cesare had met her recently.

'Yes. Please tell him quite recently, when I was attending a patient in Rome.'

The servant took this message and almost immediately asked the nurse to walk into a large sitting-room, evidently a man's room, and to sit down.

'Don Cesare will come at once,' he added.

The nurse did not sit down. She felt active. She felt braced up for a conflict. Before she left that room she was determined to secure Dolores from the danger of any persecution at the hands of the man with the fiery eyes.

She looked about the room, which was comfortable but not artistic, and was rather dark in tone. The big armchairs were of black leather much worn. And there was a huge black leather sofa standing against a solid writing-table edged with a brass rail. There were bookcases, which to Nurse Jennings' not unintelligent eyes looked as if they contained that type of literature for ever unread by any one. On a small table lay three or four neatly folded newspapers. The high dark red walls, which went up to a painted and coffered ceiling, were decorated with a few pictures; dim and mysterious oil landscapes, dim and mysterious oil ancestors, some clever sketches of horses still and in movement over obstacles, several pairs of foils, and two outrageous caricatures of Roman young men, marvellously clever and marvellously audacious, by Cirella. A large photograph of the Duke of the Abruzzi had an inscription at the bottom. Not far from it there was a photograph of Queen Margherita, also with an autograph. Upon the writing-table lay a book on the use of aeroplanes in war, *Le Roi*, a French comedy, and Paul Bourget's *Mensonges*. Between the leaves of this last was thrust a large ivory paper-knife.

The door opened, and Nurse Jennings, turning, was con-

fronted by the man she had already once faced and got rid of.

'Good morning!' she said.

Cesare came up to her, and took her hand.

'Good morning.'

He dropped her hand, which he had taken formally, even stiffly, and added:

'I hope you will sit down.'

'Thank you,' said Nurse Jennings.

She sat down on the black leather sofa.

'How is Lady Cannynge?' said Cesare.

As he spoke he lowered his brows. Nurse Jennings saw that he was violently excited, though his voice did not show it.

'I suppose you are still with her?' he added, before she had time to reply.

'No, I have come away. Lady Cannynge is with her husband now.'

'Where?'

The word came from his lips fiercely. He looked angry, as if with himself, and hastily continued:

'No doubt Lady Cannynge has come back to Rome.'

'No. Her husband has gone to her.'

He said nothing.

'They are in Sicily,' added the nurse.

'In Sicily!' said Cesare, as if struck with a stern amazement.

'I came from there yesterday. That is I got here yesterday.'

Cesare sat down.

'Lady Cannynge has been in Sicily ever since she left Rome?' he said.

He looked straight at Nurse Jennings. His black eyes had become piercing, his handsome face almost ugly with suspicion. When he was not speaking his mouth was set and obstinate. And as his expression changed, and the attraction of his youth and comeliness slipped almost mysteriously away from him, Nurse Jennings felt herself change towards him. She began to pity him and to feel something that was almost liking for him.

'Yes. We went off suddenly. She was not well. She needed a rest.'

After a short pause, during which his steady eyes never left her face, Cesare said:

'May I ask why you are kind enough to come here? Perhaps you have a letter?'

'Oh no, indeed!'

He frowned.

'What is it then, please?'

'Well—Lady Cannynge wished me to come.'

'Yes?'

Nurse Jennings felt an uneasiness, even a strong discomfort that shook her usual composure severely. She did not know how she was going to tell this man what she had come to tell him. And she almost feared what would happen when she spoke plainly.

'Lady Cannynge had some letters from you, according to her, when she was at Taormina.'

'Yes?'

'They upset her very much.'

'Did they?'

He spoke rather loudly, and with little expression, in a hard voice.

'Terribly.'

'And so she spoke to you about my letters!'

'Yes, she did. And she was very right. A woman who has been through what Lady Cannynge has must speak, if she has a true friend. We aren't like men.'

Cesare said nothing, but sat still and stared hard into the nurse's face.

'I'm bound to tell you something,' Nurse Jennings went on with difficulty. 'I know all about it.'

'All about what?' said Cesare in the same unnatural voice.

'About Lady Cannynge and you.'

'Yes?'

Suddenly Nurse Jennings felt that she must do something to break through the ugly awkwardness of this interview.

'It has all been a dreadful mistake,' she said, letting her Irish vivacity have free rein. 'But you won't let it be any worse than that! You won't ruin the life of such a sweet creature as she is! And so unhappy, too, for years!'

'I only want to make her happy!' he said, sternly, with pride.

Since Nurse Jennings had begun to speak frankly he had called pride to his aid. And now, for the first time, the nurse felt the difference between his rank and her station.

'You never can,' she blurted out bluntly. 'And I am here to tell you so.'

Cesare got up.

'What do you mean?' he said fiercely. 'What are you talking about?'

'What I know. You never can do anything for her happiness. For she's one as can only be happy through love, and she doesn't love you.'

'You know nothing about it!'

He spoke now with arrogance. But the nurse did not resent it. She felt that he was only trying to clothe himself in armour.

'I know this, that Lady Cannynge loves no one but her husband, and that she sent me here to tell you so.'

'If that is true---'

'It is true. Don't I say she's sent me here to tell you so? How could I know it, how could I have come here, if she hadn't told me in so many words, and begged me to come here?'

'If that is true, I say, then Lady Cannynge—then Lady Cannynge has---'

He broke off, almost as if he were choked. All the time he had never taken his eyes from the nurse's face, and she had seen the ready suspicion of the Italian fade into a conviction that was cruel. Cesare was too intelligent to be able to doubt complete sincerity. The nurse saw that, against his will, he believed what she had said. His manhood had received the last insult. But though for a moment he could not go on speaking, he retained his arrogant expression. Even his body looked stiff with pride as he stood in front of the sofa.

'She didn't know,' said Nurse Jennings, but now with a certain feebleness, as of one pleading a lost cause. 'She was carried away.'

'By what?' said Cesare, in a tone of bitter contempt.

Nurse Jennings looked down.

'She was carried away,' she repeated, almost dully.

Cesare turned and walked to the window.

He longed to vent his sense of outrage, his fury, upon the nurse, because she knew, and because she had dared to come to his house and to tell him such a thing. And he longed, he felt as if he absolutely needed, to commit some violent action, to let his body go in some tremendous demonstration. He stood by the window and looked down into the courtyard of the palace. And an ugly red stain disfigured his clear white complexion. That such a thing should have been said to him, and that it should be true. But was it true? Could it be true? He did not know this woman, this paid nurse. She might have told him lies. What her motive could be, if it were so, he could not divine. He was in no condition to seek it. But he would not believe her—he would not.

'Basta! Basta!' he said to himself.

He turned round, and the nurse thought he looked almost old, and quite ugly.

'I don't believe what you say,' he said. 'I don't believe Lady Cannynge is the woman you are trying to make out.'

Nurse Jennings flamed up.

'I'll thank you not to speak against Lady Cannynge to me!' she exclaimed hotly.

'It is you, not I, who have spoken against her. You know that quite well. You have accused her of an abominable action.'

'How dare —!'

'Of a caprice any woman might be ashamed of. I don't believe Lady Cannynge is capable of such conduct, of such a caprice. I will never believe it, until she either tells me personally that what you have said is true, or until she writes to me to say so. Perhaps you will be kind enough to tell her this from me. I suppose you are going to see her again. If she does not send for me, or write to me, I will call upon her directly I hear she is in Rome.'

As he was speaking the last words he walked towards the door and opened it.

'I am much obliged to you for coming,' he said.

Nurse Jennings got up and went out without saying another word. In the hall she met the *maestro di casa* who escorted her to the front door.

Within a week Cesare received the following note written by Dolores:

'All that she told you is true, and I sent her to tell it to you.—D. C.'

A few days later the 'tout-Rome' was interested to learn that Don Cesare Carelli had decided to marry, and that his choice had fallen upon Donna Ursula Montebruno.

CHAPTER XXXIX

ONE day early in the following February Sir Theodore drove over to Frascati, where the Denzil family were still living with Mrs. Massingham. The object of this particular visit was to come to a definite arrangement about little Theo's immediate future. He was to go to a preparatory school in England after Easter. Sir Theodore had been gathering particulars concerning several likely schools from English friends, and had in his hand a small packet of letters as he got out of the motor at the top of the steps leading down to the house with the red loggia.

He was wrapped up in a fur coat. After an unusually warm and radiant winter the weather had suddenly changed and become intensely cold. The sky was a blackish grey, and a strong wind blew in his face from the melancholy Campagna.

He found all the Denzils indoors. Mrs. Massingham was in bed with an attack of influenza. Vi had a cough. But Iris and little Theo were in their usual health and spirits. After a romp with them, and a talk with Mrs. Massingham, who now treated Sir Theodore as a sort of cherished relation, and did not even mind his seeing her with her hair in some confusion, Edna and he retired to the sitting-room which opened on to the loggia to read and discuss the letters. The French windows were shut. A stove heated the rather ugly, but not uncomfortable room. Edna Denzil and Sir Theodore

drew up their chairs to a small table near it, and began the discussion.

As a rule Sir Theodore was very much what Edna called 'on the spot' in conversation. His mind seldom wandered from the matter in hand. And when the children were being talked about his interest was singularly alert. Edna was, therefore, rather surprised now to find that he was occasionally absent-minded. It seemed to her that he had to make an effort to throw himself into this affair of the schools, that he was really inclined to think of something else. Nevertheless he read her all the letters and considered their contents. His preference was for a school near Ascot. The only thing against it was the fact that it was more expensive than the other schools.

'If you really believe it to be the most healthy I think Theo had better go there,' said Edna Denzil at last. 'I will manage somehow. And you know I am a little richer this year. The house in Lancaster Gate!'

She smiled at him.

'That sale was a real benefit to me.'

'To be sure!' he replied. 'I have never regretted my run over to England in September. But it was a stroke of luck finding a buyer at such a price.'

'Yes.'

'Well then, Ascot let it be!'

He put the letters into a leather case and the case into his pocket.

'How extraordinary this cold is!' he said. 'Coming so suddenly!'

He drew his chair close to the stove. He was looking straight before him. Edna Denzil took up a piece of work.

'Yes,' she said.

There was a silence. She regarded her friend with a certain curiosity. He looked, she thought, unusually grave, yet not sad. She felt that he was strongly concentrated upon some thought, perhaps some problem, that she knew nothing of. For once she and her little family were remote from his mind. As she realised this she also realised what a friend he had always been to her and her children, what a prop and stay to their lives and fortunes. And she longed to show—quickly, then, at that very moment—that her heart

made a return of golden gratitude. Driven by this impulse she said:

'Theodore, if I ever can do anything for you, help you, sympathise with you, in any sorrow or joy, don't shut me out. You have done so much for me, for us.'

He turned a little and looked at her.

'What makes you say that, just now, Edna?'

'I scarcely know. But I felt—I don't know——'

'Yes, but tell me!'

'I felt as if you had something very much on your mind. I don't mean I thought it was sad. If there was a fire instead of a stove how you would have been looking into it a minute ago?'

'Yes, that's true.'

He shifted and leaned back in his chair.

'You don't come often to Rome,' he said. 'But has the complete change in Doloretta's way of life ever struck you as strange?'

'You mean her staying so much at home?'

'She has given up the world entirely. She never touches a card, never will go to a dance. Even dinners she never goes to unless it is something that interests me. She has absolutely ceased from caring for society.'

'Yes, I heard she scarcely ever went out now. Dear mamma has been quite upset over it. You know she always looked upon Dolores as a sort of queen in the Roman world. But do you regret that Dolores has got sick of it all?'

'No—h no! On the contrary! But I am puzzled—puzzled by it. And I have been thinking——'

He broke off. A strange, almost furtive expression had come into his face.

'You know, Doloretta changed from the time we were together in Sicily,' he said, after a rather long pause.

'She never took up her gay life again after that?'

'Never. From the time we returned to Rome after that visit to Taormina she has always seemed to me a changed woman.'

'But how changed, exactly? Is she happier or sadder?'

'She is stiller. There is an extraordinary stillness about her.'

Now his bright eyes seemed questioning Edna.

'She loves quiet. Even she seems to love solitude. She sits alone for hours. It—it really is strange.'

'She isn't ill?'

'No, I don't think so. But that nurse—Nurse Jennings—is very often with her when she doesn't wish to be alone. Doloretta has taken her as a sort of *dame de compagnie* it seems to me.'

'Is she a nice woman, do you think? I know her so little. And when I met her, well, I couldn't notice things.'

'She seems a very good sort of woman, and simply devoted to my wife. But—but there's something I don't understand.'

'Why not speak frankly to Dolores, if there's anything that troubles you?'

The furtive look showed more plainly in his face.

'No, no. I couldn't do that.'

'To the nurse then?'

'I had thought of that—but no. Besides, I don't want to make myself ridiculous.'

He leaned again towards the stove. Edna Denzil noticed that he changed colour. The blood had gone to his face.

'How ridiculous?' she said, very simply.

He got up abruptly.

'After all these years, I—I daren't expect—'

He flushed deeply.

'Theodore!' Edna Denzil exclaimed. 'Oh, Theodore! You don't think it is that!'

Her face, now decidedly plain, flushed too. She got up. An extraordinary human expression, tenderness, understanding, wonder, quite transfigured her for a moment, made her beautiful.

'You really think—oh, how glad I should be!'

'I don't know. I can't believe that—impossible to know perhaps! What I feel is that perhaps Doloretta thinks it. Lately she has seemed to me to be waiting, always waiting. There's—but it can't be! It can't be! I'm a fool to think of it.'

'She would tell you of course if she knew.'

'She doesn't *know*!' he said decidedly. 'Or, of course, she would have told me.'

'Then—'

'Why has she given up the world? Why has she ceased from caring for all her usual pleasures and occupations? Why does she take such care of herself?'

'Care of herself?'

'Of her health. You have no idea how she studies her health now! But not in a silly way. It's in a sort of beautiful way. It's all so strange, Edna, all so strange. If you knew how the apartment seems altered.'

'But when did you begin to notice it all?'

'Of course I always must have noticed the alteration in Dolorettta's mode of life. But it's only quite lately—within the last few days in fact—that I've been so tremendously struck with the whole thing. I can't understand it.'

'It may be. I wish I had seen Dolores oftener of late.'

'You think you——'

'I don't know. But sometimes we women——'

'Yes, yes. You are terribly divinatory!'

He smiled and suddenly changed the conversation. A sort of reserve took him, kept him. Edna did not attempt to break through it. When he was going she said:

'Peep in on mamma again, just for a moment. She will love it.'

'Of course.'

When he came back after some minutes he said:

'She's getting on. She's quite lively. Full of a paragraph in the *Italie*.'

'Dear mamma! What is it now?'

'It seems Cesare Carelli has delayed his return from his travels, and the wedding with Donna Ursula Montebruno is not to take place till next August or September. The future bride has decided that matter, according to the *Italie*.'

'Oh,' said Edna, without any display of interest. 'And where is Don Cesare?'

'Shooting in East Africa, I believe. Your mother's quite excited about it all. She wonders if they really care for each other.'

They both laughed a little. And so they parted.

Not many days before this conversation took place Dolores felt for the first time the new life she held within her. And it was like the fluttering of a bird. As she felt it she seemed to see the dark shadow of a bird in flight pass between

her and the stars. She nearly fainted and lay still. And she found herself thinking of the old man's eyes in the Lenbach portrait. He knew. He had always known.

Presently she went into the drawing-room and she looked at the old man for a long time. As she turned to go out of the room she glanced at the 'Donna guardando il mare.' And she saw the white foam of the sea, and the storm coming from the horizon. A week later, when she was alone with her husband in the evening, she said to him:

'Would you mind if I made a slight alteration in my room?'

'Of course not,' he answered gently. 'Which room do you mean?'

'My sitting-room.'

'And what alteration?'

'I should like to get rid of that picture "La Donna guardando il mare."'

'I thought you were fond of it.'

'Yes, in a way. But it's a very sad picture.'

'We'll take it away, send it right out of the apartment.'

'Oh, no. You have it, if you like.'

'What!' he said, smiling, and still with exceptional gentleness, 'am I to have all the sad things?'

'No, no. It's only that I don't want to have it always before me just now.'

'Doloretta!' he said. His face became strongly expressive, almost emotional. 'Why are you so strange?'

She looked startled.

'Strange! I!'

'Aren't you?'

'In what way?'

'You have changed all your life.'

'That! Oh, I got tired of all the parties, society. What does it give one, after all?'

'Very little, I know. But once you seemed to delight in it.'

'No, never. Not really. I only wanted to fill up my time.'

'And you don't need to fill up your time now? Why is that?'

She looked at him. She saw at once what his thought

was. She looked down. Should she tell him now, at once? She had not meant to tell him perhaps for another month. But was it not best to give him the truth he seemed already to have divined? She stood still, looking down always.

'Why is that?' he repeated.

He came closer to her. He took her hands. Then he took her into his arms.

'Dolorette—is it? Can it be?'

She did not speak.

'After all these years?'

He heard a strange voice say:

'Yes.'

She felt his lips on her hair, kissing her, with reverence.

CHAPTER XL

FROM that moment when her husband knew, the life of Dolores was strangely altered. All that she had lost, or seemed to lose, she had again, and much more. Sir Theodore was concentrated upon her, as he had never been even in the first days of their married life. Then she had been to him the girl whom he loved. Now she was a precious thing, an exquisite mystery and wonder, life within life to be doubly worshipped, doubly cherished. Already he adored in her not only his wife but his child. His kiss upon her hair had been reverential. From that day his treatment of her was reverential. His joy now was in proportion to the sorrow she had endured in his long disappointment. He was a changed man.

At once the family at Frascati took the second place in his affections. He loved Edna and the children still. He went to them still. They did not suffer neglect at his hands. They had become and would remain part of his life. But they were not his own. And now, with the radiant instinct of the monopolist, he was looking forward, and his heart held the two precious words, 'My own.' Often he found

himself repeating them, with an addition—'My own son,' 'my own daughter,' 'my own child.'

Dolores had what she had yearned for, the almost exclusive love of her husband. But the fact that she possessed it only through hypocrisy tarnished the gift. Even as Theo had kissed her hair she had known that it was to be so. She had sinned with an object. With the attainment of that object she comprehended the punishment attached to the sin. Theo poured forth his love on the woman she was not. The woman she was suffered under that outpouring. It was so beautiful, but it was not hers, not really hers. It belonged to the woman she had been.

She was no longer afraid of events. She did not fear Princess Manelli, Cesare. The incident at Olevano had not destroyed her in the eyes of the world. She did not now believe that she ever would be so destroyed. All that she had once dreaded unspeakably in connection with Montebruno's suicide had never come to pass. The Princess had held her hand from vengeance. And now she had surely no reason for vengeance. Cesare was far away and he was engaged to Donna Ursula. He had passed out of the life of Dolores as a lover.

But he remained in her life as a father, the father of the child that was soon to be born.

Sometimes Dolores felt as if he must know, almost as if he were near to her. Sometimes she felt as if she had wronged him even more terribly than she had wronged her husband. She might have sunk under the torture of her own unworthiness but for her mystical sense of her own greatness, a sense which had never abandoned her since the moment when the new life had faintly fluttered within her.

The child took her hand and was with her in the great darkness. And she concentrated herself upon the child.

Sir Theodore had said that she was strangely still. Now she sank into a deeper stillness.

She saw very few people. She took no part in the feverish life of the Roman season. Her husband had asked her whether she wished to leave Rome, to go to the Riviera, to England; now, at once. She refused. She felt that the child for which she had longed so passionately in Rome and

for which she had sinned, must be born there, in the house where her husband had broken the long silence, and had shown to her the emptiness of his heart. He assumed that of course when the child was born they would be elsewhere.

'We will choose some delicious home, Doloretta,' he said, 'where you can look on lovely things, where you won't feel the heat of July.'

She did not tell him that probably her child would not be born in July, and that the place of its birth must surely be Rome. But she told Nurse Jennings that she meant to stay in Rome till the child was born.

'Why ever should you do that?' said Nurse Jennings. 'It would be much better on all accounts to be in some quieter, fresher place. And besides — ' she stopped.

'Yes?' said Dolores. 'Besides what, nurse?'

'Besides I should have thought that, with all that 's happened, you would be much happier away at such a time.'

'That doesn't matter.'

'What doesn't?'

'About my being happier. But I can't argue about it. I feel it must take place here, in my home.'

'Yes, my dear?' said Nurse Jennings gently. 'Well, it 's natural you should have your fancies at such a time. And they 've got to be humoured. You want to be happy where you 've been unhappy. I see.'

She did not see. But Dolores did not attempt an exact explanation.

The days grew warmer as spring approached, and Dolores often drove out to enjoy the sun. Sir Theodore usually accompanied her, but one day she went alone in the victoria. It was a Monday. There would be no music on the Pincio. She told the coachman to take a turn in the Villa Borghese, and then to go to the Pincio and draw up on the terrace before the kiosk. Had the band been playing she would not have gone there. She disliked crowds, the crush of carriages and motors, the noise of popular airs, anything in fact that troubled the stillness in which she desired perpetually to live.

There were many people walking. But when she arrived on the terrace she found few carriages. The sky was cloudless, the sun brilliant. When the horses stopped she sat for some time, almost dreaming, in the carriage.

But presently she felt more vivid, more conscious. And she remembered Nero. Here she had sat with the dog on her knee. She could almost see his domed head, his sulky and sticky eyes, the uneasy movement of his blunt and humid nose.

When she thought of the dog she no longer regretted her sin. She could not regret it, though she felt as if she were earnestly trying to. Cesare, even Theo, sank away into an obscure twilight. Only the child remained with her. And she thought again: 'Yes, it had to be born. We know scarcely anything or nothing. But Some One knows for us. Some one has known for me. His world, perhaps, needs my little child.'

Then she asked herself, 'Am I immoral to think like this?'

And she could not decide. Even she did not care. The child had hold of her soul.

A veiled voice spoke at her side. She did not hear it. In a moment it spoke again.

'You won't know me any more! What have I done?'

Dolores heard it now and turned round.

'Lady Sally!'

'Yes, it is I! Come back to Rome at last.'

'I knew you had been away,' Dolores said vaguely.

'All the winter. My brother-in-law wanted me in England.'

'Doctor Ides? But do get in for a little.'

Lady Sarah stepped into the carriage.

'It is nice and quiet to-day,' said Dolores.

She looked at Lady Sarah.

'Do you remember a day, long ago, when I told you something here?'

'Yes, very well.'

The kind grey eyes searched the face of Dolores for a moment.

'I have something to tell you now.'

'Is it good news?' asked Lady Sarah.

And surely doubt crept in her voice.

'It is this—I am going to have what I longed for.'

'My dear!' said Lady Sarah, almost in a whisper.

Her hand sought the hand of Dolores, pressed it, held it. But the kind eyes again searched the face of her friend. And presently her clasp relaxed.

She said nothing more. Dolores immediately spoke of

other indifferent things. And Lady Sarah did not attempt to lead the conversation back to the only subject. But when the day was waning, and the Angelus rang in the towers of Rome, she said to Dolores:

'Now we are going to the Church of the Sacré Cœur, are not we?'

'Yes, to-day I will go.'

They drove to the church. They entered. They kneeled down side by side. And while the nuns sang Dolores prayed for the coming child, that its life might be happy, forever sheltered from sin and from every trouble.

But Lady Sarah still prayed for the soul of Dolores.

After that day Lady Sarah sometimes came to sit with Dolores. She was very kind, even tender in her manner, and Dolores almost loved her. But Dolores was never quite at ease with her. She knew that the goodness of this singularly pure and transparently sincere nature had felt the touch of something which caused it, in despite almost of itself, to recoil. And she was punished by this recoil. What Lady Sarah suspected, whether she suspected anything, Dolores did not know. But he felt that there was now a thin barrier between them. Sometimes he longed to overstep it, she longed to be sincere. She felt that, if she did speak, Lady Sarah had a heart as well as a brain that could understand. But she knew that Lady Sarah would say, 'You must tell your husband.' And she knew that never could she tell Theo. Rather would she lie to the end, though her whole nature hated lies.

All her life now was a lie. Yet she was able to endure it. For she was able already to live for her child. With a resolute, an almost inflexible will she banished from her mind all that might too greatly trouble her peace and so do harm to the child. At first she had often much difficulty in keeping herself within the circle of calm which must aid the coming life. But day by day her power of self-governance increased. Day by day the mother in her became more dominant. Her husband noticed a dawning change in her, and one night he said, almost with a touch of whimsical jealousy:

'I have had you to myself all these years, and now, do you know what I think sometimes?'

'What, Theo?' she said.

'I think I am going to lose you.'

She looked at him with a sudden intense gravity.

'Lose me! How?'

'But—what is the matter? Why do you look like that?'

'To-day when I was driving I went to San Lorenzo.'

'Why there? To visit the church?'

'No; I went into the Campo Santo.'

'What made you do that? Was it wise?'

'I don't know that it was. But I felt obliged to go. While I was there I saw a monument. It was a woman lying dead. A little child was pulling at her hand. Underneath was written "*Mamma dort.*"'

He was silent for a moment. An expression of keen anxiety had come into his face, and his eyes were fixed upon her.

'What has such a monument to do with us?' at last he said, almost harshly.

'Nothing. But what did you mean just now?'

'I meant that you must not be too much mother to be wife. I have heard of men becoming jealous of their own children.'

'You could never be that.'

'No. But——' he lowered his voice. 'But you know how much I love you.'

Her lips formed a word which he could not hear. It was 'Now.'

'What did you say, Doloretta?' he asked.

She looked at him steadily.

'You must let me be as I wish to be all these days, Theo,' she said. 'I want to be such a mother as there has never been before.'

She said the last words almost with passion.

'I must be that!' she added.

She was seized with a longing to expiate her sin; to buy back at any price, however great, her lost virtue. That night she prayed.

'Let me suffer!' she prayed. 'Let my travail be bitter with my child. Let me pass through the darkness. I deserve it. I deserve the greatest punishment. But let me have peace, joy with the child when it comes.'

After she had prayed she felt that she ought not to expect

to have peace, joy of a child begotten in sin. Yet somehow she did not then fear the future. She felt as if the child must be to her as a light banishing the darkness in which for so long she had lived.

She had sinned for Theo.

But surely she had conceived the child for herself.

As the days drew on she was beset by the egoism of the mother, an egoism partially animal. Less often now did she think of the coming child in connection with the world.

'It is for me,' she sometimes said to herself. 'It had to be born for me.'

About this time Cesare Carelli took ship at an East African port to return to Italy and Donna Ursula.

CHAPTER XLI

CESARE arrived in Europe at the beginning of June. Physically he was in splendid health, thin, lithe, hard, keen, burnt by the sun almost to the colour of a desert Arab. He looked more male even than when he had quitted Italy. And he looked years older. His mental health had not kept pace with his bodily condition. In the superbly sound body there was housed an embittered soul. Dolores' treatment of him had stung into alertness all that was worst in his strong nature. He had left Italy an almost desperate man. He returned to Italy a hard man, cynical, careless of the happiness of those about him; not unready, perhaps almost anxious, to wound; resolutely selfish, a determined egoist. One woman had taken him when he did not really love her, had kept him like a prey when he was struggling to get free from her; had driven him almost to despair by her love. Another, whom he passionately loved, had taken him and immediately flung him away. He was resolved to hate all women. He believed that he hated Dolores. He said to himself that he had been a fool, that those men are right who put women on a low plane, who even deny to them souls. Nerves, uneasy sharp vanity, an animal desire to

please, the craft of low natures, sensuality, even ferocity when their passions are roused—such are the attributes of women. So Cesare reiterated to himself. Henceforth they should be to him as are the women of the East to their Eastern masters, ministers to his pleasure, perhaps often base. But they should be nothing more. Into his real life they should not enter. Not one should ever again even suspect his best part, that part which knew how to love and to suffer. He would marry the greatest dot in Italy. A woman should make his material life something for his friends and acquaintances to wonder at and desire. Women had used him. Now he would use them.

He returned to his country alertly at his worst.

Donna Ursula had quitted Rome and was staying with his people in Lombardy. The date and the details of his marriage were now to be decided. Little Donna Ursula had what is called 'a level head,' and was far too sure of herself ever to be in a fuss. But she considered that the time had arrived for her to take Cesare. He had been amusing himself long enough. From henceforth he must think about amusing her.

When he reached Genoa he found telegrams informing him that he was expected at the Castello near Monza. He read them, re-read them, and instead of getting into the train for Milan he got into the train for Rome.

'By God!' he said to himself. 'They shall see I'm not tied to a string, to be pulled wherever they choose!'

At least he had been free in East Africa. Already he felt the shackles of civilised life weighing upon him. Instinctively he braced himself up to fling them off with a hardy fierceness.

'I'll go to Monza when I choose,' he thought. 'Not a minute before.'

In far-away regions it seemed that he had lost the well-bred Roman's care for the *convenances*.

He arrived in Rome. The season was over. Many people had already gone away to the lakes and elsewhere. But there were still some left. Cesare went to the club and was soon surrounded, soon heard much of the gossip of Rome. But he did not chance to hear anything about the Cannynges. And he did not choose to make any inquiries

about them. The men whom he met were mostly Romans and chattered of Roman doings.

He wrote to his people that he was detained for two or three days by important business. He wrote to Donna Ursula politely. He had never pretended to any love for her. She had meant to marry him. In a fit of rage and of wounded pride he had given her to understand that he would be her husband some day. That was quite enough for her. And, of course, he meant to carry out his part of the bargain. Nevertheless, this return to Rome, after his long absence, made a strong impression upon Cesare, almost against his will. It recalled many memories, of Lisetta and his escape, of Dolores and his passion. As he looked up and saw the line of the Academy of France cutting the brilliant blue, he remembered the fireflies in a garden by night. As he heard the bells of Rome he remembered the bells ringing in the valley beneath the terrace of Casa Truechi. And the city in which he had been born caressed him and chastised him, woke again the gentler part of his nature, yet at the same time stirred the fierceness within him till it glowed with a stronger life. It was as if some one moved the embers. Through the crust of his hardness wrath broke forth once more. But beneath the wrath was hidden a softness of longing, though he would have denied it.

Two days after his arrival towards evening, when he was walking along the Corso and was near to Aragno's, he met Sir Theodore Cannynge.

'Hullo, Don Cesare!' said Sir Theodore.

His voice was cordial. He held out his hand. Cesare was immediately struck by a change in him. Happiness, a joyous expectation, shed through him something that was almost like a renewal of youth. His eyes, always bright, beamed with contentment. His deep and melodious voice was resonant with a strong satisfaction. And immediately Cesare's mind bristled with a curiosity in which there was an alloy of suspicion.

'You've been away a long time, I suppose?' said Sir Theodore.

'Some months. And you are in Rome so late?'

'Yes. We aren't leaving just yet.'

It seemed to Cesare that Sir Theodore looked at him with expectation. Of what?

'I was going to have a cup of coffee at Aragno's,' Sir Theodore continued.

'I 'll come with you, if you 'll allow me.'

'Do.'

They sat down on a couple of chairs by a table outside the caffé and gave their order.

'I hope Lady Cannynge is quite well?' said Cesare formally.

A surprised expression showed in Sir Theodore's eyes.

'There is something I don't know,' Cesare thought. 'Something he thinks I know!'

'Thank you,' Sir Theodore said, with a slight touch of reserve and hesitation. 'Thank you! Oh, here 's the coffee.'

He busied himself with it for a moment. Then he said:

'How long have you been back?'

'A couple of days.'

'Only that! I see.'

'I 've heard little or nothing of all that 's been happening in my absence. There isn't anything very extraordinary, I suppose, that I ought to know?'

Almost unconsciously he fixed his black eyes on Sir Theodore with a scrutiny which was unusual, which was perhaps scarcely pardonable. It showed too plainly the suspicion which now had hold of him, and which he himself did not understand.

'Only the usual marriages, deaths, and births, I believe,' Sir Theodore replied, with a certain new carelessness.

He began to talk more rapidly, but with less vivacity, of casual topics of the day. And as soon as they had drunk their coffee the two men got up and parted.

But Cesare now believed that he knew what Sir Theodore had not told him. His mind had surely started upon the truth. But he must find out, he would find out at once, whether the surmise which filled him with an excitement almost ungovernable was well founded or not. And if it were! If it were!

Fate favoured him. The next day by chance he met *a vecchia*, Lady Sarah Ides. He saw her before she was

aware of him, and his resolution was immediately taken. He went up to her, greeted her, and walked quietly along beside her. After talking for a few minutes of his travels and sport he said:

'Now I'm trying to gather up the threads again, meeting some of my friends. Yesterday I had coffee at Aragno's with Sir Theodore Cannynge.'

'Did you?'

'How well and jolly he looks, years younger! I suppose this unexpected event——' he paused, with his eyes on her face.

Had his arrow hit the mark?

'You mean—his hopes?' said Lady Sarah.

'Of course!'

'You have heard of them already?'

There was a sound of doubt, almost of distrust, in her voice.

'Well, one hears rumours. And directly I saw him I knew they were well founded. As the English say, he gave it away. His whole look, manner, seemed to me to proclaim great tidings.'

'Really! I should hardly have thought Sir Theodore would be so exuberant. Well, I am turning off here.'

'Let us hope it will be a son,' said Cesare.

He took off his hat and left her. She walked on slowly. The face under her thin veil, put on awry as usual, was very grave and troubled.

As soon as he had left her Cesare walked swiftly home. He shut himself in alone and told his servant that he would dine at home in his library, and that he was not *in case* to any one.

The library was the room in which he had received Nurse Jennings. He went into it now, sat down on the great black sofa and stared at the floor. But he only sat thus for a moment. Then he sprang up, went into the adjoining bedroom, unlocked a red-leather despatch-box in which he kept things that he specially valued, opened it, searched for a moment, then drew out a key. He relocked the box, took the key, and returned to the sofa in the farther room. There he flung himself down with violence and stared at the small object in his hand. His heavy brows came down over

his eyes. His face began to work. He set his teeth together. But his lower jaw quivered. Furiously he grasped it with his left hand.

The latchkey that had belonged to Dolores! It had made all the African journey with him. If the happy man he had met in the Corso knew that he possessed it! The happy man!

Sir Theodore's face rose up before Cesare. He saw the bright eyes full at first of expectation. He had been expected to utter his congratulations, no doubt—he, the father of the child that was about to be born!

Not for a moment did Cesare doubt the paternity of the coming child. He knew it was his. All his body and all his soul declared it to him as he sat there looking at the key in his hand. And that man with the silvered hair whom he had met in the Corso, that man who had been a childless husband for more than ten years, that old man, was he to——? By God, no! That would be too much!

Cesare thrust the key into his pocket and began to pace his room. This new fact had brought back all the almost sacred energy of his bitterness, sacred because it was surely the part of a man treated as he had been to rise up in revolt. Treated as he had been! But the whole matter was not in the past. The present, the abominable present, was with him calling his manhood to arms, to action. He had returned in bitterness. But he had returned having, as he supposed, forever closed his life against Dolores. Now she entered it again bringing a child, his child, with her. She thought, perhaps, that she was without, but it was not true. The child brought her into his life definitely, whether with, or against, her will.

What was he going to do?

The afternoon closed in. The evening fell. The night approached. And the hours had fled by Cesare with a swiftness he only realised when his servant came in to lay the dinner-table.

'What? Is it eight?' he said, with an almost startled movement.

'Five minutes to eight, eccellenza.'

'Very well.'

He went to his bedroom and washed his face and hands in

cold water. He did not change his clothes, but dined quickly just as he was, ordered coffee, got rid of his man, and was alone once more. But now it was night and he felt much more alone.

A child—his child—the child of himself and Dolores! He brooded over that thought in a darkness lit only by the flaming end of his cigar, and by the pallor of the hot black night at the open window. This fact changed everything. He had resigned the woman. But he was resolved not to resign the child. It was not that he felt as yet at his heart-strings the tug of fatherhood. He was too conscious of being wronged to be tender. What he felt was that there was a conspiracy against him to keep what was his, what was more absolutely his than anything he had hitherto possessed. And he was not the man to be the tame victim of such a conspiracy.

He did not know what he would do. But he did know that he was not going to let the man he had met in the Corso father his child. There must be a way out. He could not find it. He wondered when the child was going to be born. His mind went back to Olevano.

Excitement increased in him. He ceased from brooding. The flaming mind cannot brood for long.

If he could see Dolores alone! He thought again of the latchkey. With it he could enter the apartment in Palazzo Barberini at any hour of the day. But Cannynge was there. If only he would leave Rome, even for a day! But Cesare remembered his face, his manner. No, he would not go. He was waiting on the threshold of fatherhood!

Cesare broke into a laugh, letting his cigar fall on the floor. The irony of the whole business! He picked up the cigar and went to the window. He stood by it for a long time leaning out, and looking down into the deserted courtyard of the palace.

And Donna Ursula?

When he thought of her Cesare realised that the incident of the child had hurried him back, as if along the ways of the past, towards the woman he had loved. He could not now say to himself that he hated Dolores. No. And suddenly his real desire leaped up in his mind, whole, almost barbarously simple.

What he wanted to do was this: to come forward openly, ruin Dolores in the eyes of her husband and the world, and then take possession of her and of the child. He wanted them to be cast out. Till they were he could not give them shelter. His child he would have. On that he was resolved. And the mother—did she not, must she not go with the child?

It was not done with that episode which had culminated at Olevano. He had accepted his dismissal from the woman. But fate was working against the woman.

If only he could see Dolores alone!

He lingered on in Rome through the sunny days of June. His mother wrote at first plaintively, then indignantly, urging him to come to them in Lombardy.

'If this sort of thing continues,' she wrote, 'you will lose Ursula. No girl will stand such treatment, and Ursula has a great deal of character. Think what such a loss would mean. She is the best match in Italy, and one of the best in Europe. Come to us at once.'

But since he had met Sir Theodore, Donna Ursula, with her primrose-coloured hair, her staring blue eyes of a doll, had become as nothing to Cesare. Once she had meant to him a compact little will, at least that. But now she faded into those shadows which shroud the spectres of the real.

She did not write. But though she was deeply offended, even indignant in a cold way, she was waiting. Cesare had got to be hers. That was how she put it to herself. And hers he was certainly going to be.

In the past Cesare had proved that, despite the secret vehemence of his temperament, he could be patient. He had once been patient for Dolores. And now, in the lengthening days, he forced himself to be patient for his child. He looked at the latchkey, but he did not use it. He never called at Palazzo Barberini. He trampled down the flames in his heart. He waited.

And, in an old palace of Rome, a woman was waiting too for the birth of the coming child.

This woman was Princess Manelli. She only suspected what Cesare was so sure of. Her jealousy suspected. If at the appointed time—the time she had calculated—the child

was born, she was resolved to stay her hand no longer. She did not reason. She had reasoned. She had held her hand. The lovers had been divided, the engagement between Donna Ursula and Cesare brought about. But now the surface of things was changed.

She had heard of Cesare's return from Africa. She knew he was in Rome. She knew he had not visited Lombardy or taken the trouble to greet his *fiancée*.

So the end was not yet. Her action, it seemed, had not accomplished all that she had intended it to accomplish. Her jealousy wove combinations which kept her sleepless by night. She saw herself tricked by the woman with the wistful eyes, whom she had studied, whom she had striven to sum up, whom she had certainly never penetrated, never comprehended. In that apparent gentleness of Dolores Cannynge there must be hidden a hard will. Beneath the seeming sincerity there must lurk the heart of a clever trickster. The Princess remembered their conversation when Pacci came, and her remark to Dolores: 'Perhaps you know how to *jouer le monde* far better than we Latins do despite our apparent suppleness of mind.' She remembered, too, that murmured sentence of her visitor, 'To get and—to keep.' It had touched her on the raw then. But now the remembrance of it seared her as if a hot iron was applied to wounds that were open. Those words, combined with recent events, seemed to tell her plainly that she had been deliberately played with; that Dolores had only seemed to relinquish Cesare at her—the Princess's—bidding; that everything, his engagement, his departure, his long absence, the new 'honeymoon' of the Cannynges which had been observed by all Rome—everything which had occurred to reassure her, had been merely part of an elaborate plan to throw dust in her jealous and scrutinising eyes.

Well—she laid her hand in the night on a letter, the letter which Montebruno had written just before he committed suicide. That was her weapon. And with every day that passed she was gathering will to use it.

She had only to put it in the post, with Sir Theodore's name and address on the envelope, and Dolores Cannynge would be ruined.

What would happen after that she did not know. And in

her present mood she did not care. She had cared so much that she had not yet sent the letter, the sending of which might give Dolores to Cesare. But now she was willing to risk that, to risk anything, rather than to go on shielding the woman who had wrecked her life, and who, she began to believe, was playing a long comedy to trick her.

Perhaps it was even Dolores Cannynge who had made Cesare propose to Donna Ursula to cover her own intrigue. Since she had heard of the child Princess Manelli had passed out of the region in which she had been able to think clearly and reason calmly. Hidden in the darkness the little dawning life had already cast out its influence, the tremendous influence which appertains only to that in which God has put a part of Himself. It had changed four lives. It had given joy, stillness, a flame, a sword.

When Princess Manelli had first heard of the hopes in the Cannynge household she had felt as if a sword entered her heart. In that moment of keen and exquisite suspicion she was conscious that she knew for the very first time just how much, and how, she loved Cesare. She loved him mainly with the flesh, and the flesh repaid her in its own hideous fashion. Never—she felt it violently—never, till now, in this new suspicion, had she fully grasped the fact of the whole meaning of her lover's connection with Dolores Cannynge. Never till now had she known the whole meaning of jealousy.

Let the child be born at the time she had calculated and the blow should fall. She cared nothing for consequences. All that she cared for was to strike, and to strike at the moment when the blow would prove deadly.

Meanwhile in Palazzo Barberini Dolores was preparing herself for the sacred act of woman, for the handing on of the torch.

With the sure instinct of her sex—guided no doubt by the inflexible hand of the great Mother—she had found the way of release from those mental tortures which, if endured by her at this period, must have harmed the budding life.

She had given herself wholly to the child. Secretly, mysteriously, she had abandoned lover, husband, even her old self, and had stolen away to the child. With it already she was enclosed as in some hidden refuge, known only to

the child and herself. The few who saw her noticed the great change in her. And to more than one it now seemed like a withdrawal. Often now to her husband she gave a strange impression of remoteness.

'You must not abandon me wholly because of our child,' he said to her once, half playfully.

She was surprised by the subtlety of his instinct, which had so seldom led him aright in the days that were gone. But she only said gravely:

'Till it is born I must think only of it, live only for it.'

'Yes, till it is born!' he answered, with a gravity akin to hers. 'You are right. We men can't understand these things.'

'No.'

'I only meant'—he took her hand—'don't go too far away from me.'

'But I'm always with you.'

'You know I mean in spirit.'

She did not answer. He said no more. And by degrees he became more accustomed to the change in her, more reconciled to it. He even at last came almost to love it, connecting it with the mystery of motherhood. And one day, standing before the picture attributed to Luini, he said to himself, as he looked at the pale Madonna leaning over the Holy Child:

'All true mothers descend from her. My Dolegetta too!'

And tears came into his eyes.

And from that day he never tried to combat the gentle remoteness, the still indifference to the life and the people around her, that seemed to emanate subtly from Dolores, changing all the atmosphere of his home. The reverence he had felt when he kissed her hair increased upon him. Day by day he was more conscious of the sacredness of womanhood. By his wife's apparent coldness to him he measured her passion for the child.

'Let the child have everything now,' he said to himself. 'Everything to make it perfect.'

And it seemed to him that the feeling of Dolores would help to form it, to make its tiny limbs exquisite, its little face beautiful, even its nature tender and good.

Nurse Jennings, at the urgent request of Dolores, had

now come to live in the palace. Sir Theodore thought her an excellent nurse, and a highly competent young woman. But he did not quite like her. He never felt completely at his ease with her, found little to say to her, and was generally conscious of a slight sense of relief when she was out of his sight. And he came actually to dislike being in a room with both the nurse and his wife. A sensation of antagonism then beset him, as if the two sexes were, and must always be, inevitably at war, and as if man were the inferior fighter. He hid this feeling carefully, and was always specially polite to the nurse. But he looked forward eagerly to the time when she would be no more with them.

She seemed sometimes to stand between him and his wife, to emphasise the latter's withdrawal from him, to will that he should remain in an unpleasant, almost unnatural solitude.

'Only a few weeks now!' he said to himself one evening.

But he was beginning to be haunted by anxiety. For two or three days he had seen very little of his wife. She had passed much time in her bedroom. Nurse Jennings had advised him to leave her alone as much as possible, to let her have perfect quiet.

'But what is the matter?' he asked, on this evening. 'Surely—is she suffering?'

'Everything is quite normal, Sir Theodore,' the nurse replied, coldly he thought, and looking at him with her steady eyes. 'There is no need for any special anxiety.'

But Sir Theodore was not satisfied.

'We ought not to have remained in Rome,' he said. 'This languid air must be exhausting her, doing her harm. I always wanted to take her away.'

'Yes, Sir Theodore. But she took it into her head that it must be here. It was best to humour her.'

'But think of the heat of July! Several weeks more, and already——'

The nurse said nothing, and made a slight movement as if to step back into Dolores' bedroom. But Sir Theodore stopped her.

'Wait a moment, nurse!'

He went on, whispering:

'It isn't too late even now!'

'What for, Sir Theodore?'

'To get her away.'

'She must remain here,' the nurse replied, with a decision that sounded stern.

'But why? I don't mean far.'

'Quite impossible.'

'But to Frascati, or Anzio! At Anzio she would have splendid sea air. I could easily get a villa, and we could go by motor-car slowly. It is quite near.'

'Lady Cannynge must not be moved till the child is born.'

Again the nurse turned away, and again Sir Theodore stopped her.

'But—I don't understand——'

The word 'premature' had suddenly come into his mind, almost on to his lips.

'Let me——' he said, and he made a movement towards the bedroom.

'She's tired to-night, and was just dropping off to sleep when I left her,' said the nurse inflexibly.

He stopped.

'Oh, then——'

'There is nothing to fuss about Sir Theodore. If you will only be calm, and just wait, without worrying or disturbing Lady Cannynge, there is no reason that I can see why all should not go quite as it ought.'

After a moment of silence, he said:

'Very well. I trust your experience.'

'Thank you.'

'But if—if——'

He broke off. He had been about to say, 'If you are deceiving me!'

But what reason would the nurse have for deceiving him? And to say those words would be to insult the woman on whom his wife relied.

'I trust your experience and devotion,' he said.

And he turned and walked rapidly away.

Nurse Jennings went softly back into the bedroom.

As she was shutting the door from within there came a sound that was like a gasping sigh. It was followed by a cry:

'Nurse! O nurse! nurse!'

In the early morning of the following day, the twenty-ninth of the month, after eight hours of agony, Dolores gave birth to a male child.

CHAPTER XLII

For years Sir Theodore had longed to have a child, and had imagined the first joys of fatherhood, the pride, the triumph, the tenderness a man must surely feel, who holds in his arms the result of his love for the woman he has chosen to be the companion of his life. Always he had imagined joy in connection with fatherhood. Never had he gazed into shadows, or confronted a great darkness.

Yet now that he himself at last attained, as he supposed, his greatest desire, he knew a fear keener than any which had assailed him in the past, a fear which overshadowed his triumph, which opened an abyss at his feet into which he gazed with horror.

Supposing the birth to be premature his very first anxiety had been for the child. He feared that the child might not be normal, healthy, strong, perfect. The doctor and Nurse Jennings reassured him. And his own eyes bore witness to the truth.

The infant had no blemish, was indeed a perfect specimen of a baby, such as might have gladdened the heart of the most exacting or doubting father.

That first fear banished, a greater fear came upon him.

It was created by the condition of Dolores.

Although this was her first child the after pains were terrible, and lasted for nearly forty-eight hours.

During all this time Sir Theodore never slept and seldom rested. Kept out of his wife's room, where Nurse Jennings was in charge, a second nurse having been hastily sent for to take care of the child, he paced the immense apartment, going from chamber to chamber but incessantly returning

to the lobby where hung the picture of the Madonna and Child close to his wife's door. Posts came, but he read no letters. They lay heaped on the table in his study. Cards were left, but he did not even glance at the names upon them. He told the servants almost fiercely that he would see no one and must be left entirely alone. From time to time he ate a morsel of food. Often he went to gaze at the tiny child with its strange black eyes that seemed looking inward at things no one on earth had seen. Then he resumed his walk or, throwing himself on a chair or sofa, closed his eyes and strove to be calm, to combat his growing fear.

Why had he never envisaged this possibility of the mother giving her life for the child? Or had he envisaged it? He remembered well his conversation with Dolores when she had described her visit to San Lorenzo. For a moment, then, he had been troubled, had thought of death in connection with birth. But he had put the thought away almost at once. And even then surely his mind had only said to itself, 'Such a thing might happen but not to Doloretta, never to Doloretta, to my wife, the woman whom I love so much and who has been my companion for so many years.'

Now he did face this fearful possibility. Perpetually he thought of that monument in the Campo Santo of San Lorrenzo, of the mother lying dead, of the tiny child pulling at her hands, of the words, *Mamma dort.*

Driven by thought he sprang up, again went from room to room. But his mind was more feverishly active when he was in movement. It was as if the black thoughts walked with him, keeping him company with an assiduous eagerness, passing with him through the high doorways, standing with him before the pictures, listening with him outside that room in which was a tortured woman.

And when the night fell the troop of the thoughts increased, till he felt himself in the midst of a crowd of moving things draped in black and with terrible hidden faces.

With a sort of frightful carefulness, a precision almost cold and petty, he laid before him a life without Dolores. She was dead. Her bedroom was empty. All the things she had been accustomed to use stood in their places, gathering dust. Her gowns hung in the wardrobes, growing old-fashioned. Her hats lay in the drawers and boxes. And

how silent the room was! In her drawing-room the piano was shut.

Softly he went into her drawing-room, and stood there looking at everything, and saying to himself, 'She is dead. And how is it here?' Lenbach's old man met his eyes, still fiercely alive though Dolores was dead. He looked round missing something. Then he remembered. The '*Donna guardando il mare*' was in his library now. A conversation came back to his mind in connection with that picture. Dolores had asked him to take it out of the room. She had said, 'You have it, if you like.' He had answered, 'What! Am I to have all the sad things?' But he had taken the picture, and he had kept it.

All the sad things! If it were true? If he were fated to endure great sorrows, perhaps the greatest that a man can undergo? But, here, once more man's strange and unreasoning optimism for a moment returned to him, and he said to himself, 'No. Other men may be destined to such a fate but it is not possible that I am.' Nevertheless, immediately afterwards he continued carefully to imagine his life in Rome as a widower: the waking up in the morning without Dolores, the frightful freedom, no one to consult as to the laying out of the day; the coffee taken alone, the walk, the return to lunch in solitude; the stretching afternoon, tea-time with no Dolores sitting beside him to pour out tea, to give him his cup; the closing in of the evening, the lighting up of the rooms, the dinner hour, the silence, the deadly silence of the night. He shuddered. The cold precision became impossible to him. Such a life could not be in store for him.

Then he thought of the child. Even if he lost the mother the child would be left. No longer a husband there would remain to him the life of the father.

But now he, who had so almost desperately desired a child, recoiled from the thought of being left alone with a child which had killed its mother. No doubt he was affected by his gnawing anxiety, by his lack of sleep. The second night of Dolores' agony had fallen around him. His body was beginning to suffer severely under the strain of the mind's painful and almost sinister activity. Perhaps for this reason he was now companioned by a morbid horror, horror at the

idea of being the father of a child which had caused Dolores such torment, a torment which still continued, and which might end in her death. In vain he said to himself that all this was ordained, was the mysterious work of Nature, was necessary—why, no man knew or would ever know on this side of the veil—served some hidden purpose. In vain he dwelt upon the absolute innocence of the little child, now sleeping calmly while he could not sleep. The horror remained with him and became more threatening, till at last came the thought, 'If Doloretta dies I shall hate the child, my child!'

In that moment he knew how deep his love for his wife must be. Or was it really his love for the mother of the child? Certain it was that the Dolores in agony meant more to him than the sleeping child, far more. He felt that he would allow the child to die if its death could save the mother. He no longer recognised himself. This man, wakeful in the dead hours, was like a stranger, with feelings he—Theodore Cannynge—was aware of with amazement, with desires he surely could not share. Yet he was, somehow, identified with these feelings, these desires. They were not his—and his.

He strove to detach his surely murderous thought from the child, fearing himself almost as a potential assassin. What is man that he can live till middle age, and never know himself?

This stranger was frightful to Theodore Cannynge.

He went very softly to the lobby outside the room of Dolores. It was two o'clock in the morning. He turned on a light which shone just above the picture he thought a Luini. He gazed at the Mother and Child.

'She suffered!' he thought, as his eyes dwelt on the Virgin. How calm she looks!' He felt comforted in that moment. Surely Dolores would emerge from the darkness and the pain as millions of mothers had emerged. We wrestle with Death and how often we overcome him. There is a destined hour. Till that hour strikes Death may want us but he cannot have us.

And if the mother lived how he would love the child!

As he was about to extinguish the light the door of Dolores' room opened, and Nurse Jennings came quickly

out. When she saw Sir Theodore she shut the d her swiftly, but gently.

'O Sir Theodore!' she said, with reproach, but with pity too. 'Why don't you go to bed?'

'I can't!'

'But this is the second night you—'

'I can't!'

She shook her head.

'How—how—?' he whispered.

The nurse sighed.

'The pains are beginning to go off a little.'

'Well then—then that's good,—hopeful!'

'Yes, of course.'

'Why do you look like that?' he whispered sharply.

'She's so weak,' the nurse said.

They looked at each other for a moment in silence. Then Sir Theodore turned away. He went back to the suite of sitting-rooms and resumed his unquiet walk.

A little before five o'clock in the morning he heard a faint rustling and a step somewhere in the distance. In a moment he saw Nurse Jennings coming towards him.

'What is it?' he exclaimed. 'She isn't—?'

He dared not finish the sentence. He stood still, staring.

'You might come and see her,' the nurse said.

He caught her arm.

'Then she's better!'

'The pains are over.'

'And she asked—?'

'No. She hasn't said anything.'

Cold seized him.

'Not said—!'

'She's very much exhausted, terribly exhausted. The doctor will be back almost directly. I'm expecting him every minute.'

Sir Theodore's hand closed on her arm.

'Why have you come for me?'

'Because I thought you'd like to see her for a moment. Wouldn't you?'

His hand dropped.

'Yes—of course.'

He looked on the ground. He was trying to combat the cold.

'Go in to her!' Nurse Jennings said in a very low voice.

Again Sir Theodore stared at this woman. At this moment it seemed to him as if she held in her hands the keys of life and of death. Then he went into the bedroom. He did not notice whether the nurse followed him, whether the door was shut behind him or not. As he came into the room there flashed into his mind a scene of the past: Dolores trying on hats when he sought her to tell her about the illness of Francis Denzil. He remembered the ugly impression that scene had made upon him. Then he had been thinking of death, dreading death. And a trivial incident connected with the lighter side of life had almost shocked him. Dolores and the room looked different now. If only he could see her in actuality! If only he could hear her voice now asking:

'Do you think yellow becoming?'

The big room was dimly lit by a lamp burning near the bed. He approached slowly. There was no sound to welcome him. He saw Dolores. She was lying on her back. Her tall figure was stretched straight out on the bed. Her hands and arms were hidden under the coverlet. Her dark hair lay in heavy bunches on the low pillow. Her white face looked very small.

'Dolorètta!' he said softly.

Her eyes were open and gazed at him. She did not say anything. Without bending over her, kissing her, touching her, he sat down near the bed. Then he made a movement. His instinct was to take her hand. But her hands were still hidden.

She looked tired, terribly tired. But it was not that fact which held him still in a coldness of fear. The expression in her eyes, and, so it seemed to him, in her whole face, overwhelmed him. There was intelligence in it, not keen, but profound, brooding, heavy. And this intelligence was remote and stern. She gazed at him, and she gazed as if she certainly saw him. He felt quite sure she had watched his approach, had noted his actions, knew who he was and why he was there. He even felt sure that she knew what he was feeling in that moment.

But he, and what he did, what he felt, where he was, no longer affected her, no longer mattered to her at all. To her he perhaps appeared like a dot in the foreground of some immense scene, which stretched away into a distance so vast that he, and such as he, could not even conceive of it.

He sat quite still for some time, he did not know how long, without taking his eyes from his wife's face. He did not dare to move, or to speak again. He feared to disturb this tremendous contemplation. As he watched he noticed that the eyelids of Dolores frequently closed and opened again, as the eyelids of human beings ordinarily do. And he found that this fact presently gave him a very faint feeling of relief. Once, for an instant, the eyelids remained closed, and he saw the long curling lashes against the white cheeks, and remembered his first moments of love for Dolores. Then the eyes opened, he thought more widely. The expression in them seemed to him to change, to become less brooding, and more imperative.

'She wants the child!' he said to himself.

He turned round. The bedroom door was a little way open. He got up, went to it, and looked out into the lobby.

Nurse Jennings was there. He joined her.

'Fetch the child!' he whispered. 'She wants the child.'

Without a word Nurse Jennings went away. Sir Theodore remained in the lobby, waiting for the child to be brought. When Nurse Jennings returned, carrying against her breast a white bundle, in the midst of which a tiny, dark face could be discerned, he preceded her into the room, and went up to the bed. This time he dared to bend down over his wife.

'You wanted the child,' he said. 'We have brought him.'

Dolores turned her eyes towards the white bundle. Nurse Jennings was about to sit down by the bed when Sir Theodore said:

'Give me the child.'

She made a slight movement, as if of protest. But he took the baby from her, with delicate care. He felt that only he knew what Dolores wanted, that only he could gratify her tremendous desire.

As he took the baby the sleeping eyes opened and stared at him gravely.

He kneeled down by the side of the bed. With a slow

effort Dolores raised herself. She moved her arms, drawing them up, and lifting herself on her elbows. Her white hands emerged from beneath the coverlet. Sir Theodore held the baby in front of her, so that she could look down on him. For a moment she gazed into his large, black eyes, and he gazed up at her. Then her expression slightly changed, softened a very little, became a little less remote. Her lips moved. Sir Theodore leaned nearer to her, and heard her say, under her breath, 'Not for me.'

'Doloretta—what?' he whispered. 'But look! It is our child!'

He paused, scrutinising her.

'It is your child,' he almost faltered.

She turned her eyes slowly from the baby, and looked at her husband.

'Not for me,' she repeated, with a deep sigh.

The stern expression returned to her face. She sighed again faintly. Her elbows slipped. Her hands disappeared beneath the coverlet. Her head dropped sideways upon the pillow.

The baby closed his eyes and slept once more.

But Sir Theodore did not notice it. He was gazing at two tears, which had welled up in those stern eyes of the woman he loved, and hung for an instant on her long eyelashes.

'Doloretta!' he whispered. 'Doloretta!'

Nurse Jennings took the baby from his arms with a trembling swiftness.

'O Sir Theodore!' he heard her say behind him. 'She 's gone!'

He turned his head toward her.

'Gone?' he said.

The nurse began to sob, bending down over the baby.

Then he understood. He turned. He leaned over the long figure on the bed, kissed the wet eyelids and closed the eyes of Dolores.

. . . . . .

It was the day after the funeral of Dolores. She had been buried near Francis Denzil in the English burial ground outside the walls of Rome. Now the sun shone to greet the man who must rise and face his new life.

Sir Theodore made his toilet and dressed mechanically. Nurse Jennings was still in the house, but intended to leave that day. Since the death of Dolores her manner had changed towards Sir Theodore. She had seen his grief. She could not feel towards him quite as she had formerly felt. Nevertheless she was anxious to be away. A singularly frank, and almost bluntly truthful woman, now that Dolores, whom she had really loved, was gone she wished to get out of the insincere atmosphere which, it seemed to her, must for ever brood about the child that remained with Sir Theodore. And she had insisted on resigning the charge of the child to the second nurse who had been engaged. In bed, after the funeral, she had 'cried herself nearly sick.' Now she, too, got up and began to make her last preparations.

After his pretence of breakfast Sir Theodore wandered through the rooms. His shoulders were a little bowed. His head drooped. His face was lined and haggard. To-day he did not feel exactly sad. He felt strange, dull, vague and hopeless, but scarcely sad.

The rooms seemed immense as he went through them, horribly immense. He made up his mind to give them up as soon as possible. He would go away. He would take the child to England.

At the funeral there had been very few people besides himself and Nurse Jennings. Edna Denzil had come, and little Theo. Lady Sarah had been there. As Sir Theodore was leaving the burial ground he had seen Cesare Carelli getting quickly into a motor-car, and had faintly wondered what the young man was doing in that neighbourhood. It had never occurred to him that Carelli might be there in connection with the burial of his wife.

Lady Sarah, too, had seen Cesare, and her face had quivered under her veil.

Just before Sir Theodore drove away she had taken his hand, and had said in a low voice:

'Could I be of any use? I loved her.'

'Thank you,' he had replied.

She held his hand.

'Would you like me to come to-morrow? Can I help at all with the child? I have had children of my own though, I have none now. And I—I care very much for little children.'

'Yes, thank you. Do come,' he had answered.

He had hardly known what he was saying, but he had been conscious of a slight sensation of comfort and support at the moment.

To-day, however, he had forgotten all about the matter.

Presently, after gazing at many things which had belonged to his wife, after opening the piano, handling her music, standing for a long while before her writing-table on which lay several unopened letters addressed to her, he went to his library. The table there was heaped with letters. He had not looked at one since the birth of the child.

Mechanically he sat down at the table. All these letters to read and to answer! And what was the good of it all? He rested his head on his hand, leaning his elbow on the blotting-pad. He felt fearfully tired, in the body and in the soul, as if all his forces were burnt out, as if only grey ashes were left. Even the child meant nothing to him at this moment. It had killed the mother. He had imagined that deed, and himself left alone with the child. He had imagined that he might hate the child. To-day he was incapable, as he supposed, of hatred or love. Indeed it seemed to him quite impossible that any body ever could possess enough energy for either the one or the other.

As he rested his head on his hand he looked down at the pile of unopened letters. He saw Edna Denzil's handwriting on an envelope which had arrived that morning, and at last, with a sigh, he lifted his head, and laid his hand on it. He opened it, and read a very tender message of loving friendship and intensely sincere sorrow. The last words were:

'You have been like a father to my fatherless little ones. Can I not help you by showing my love for your motherless child? Tell me presently what I may do. Your friend, EDNA DENZIL.'

This letter, though it did not stir in him any deep emotion, gave a certain impetus to his hitherto stagnant mind. He began to think and to remember, to realise more strongly life and himself in life. But this increasing power of thought alarmed him. He feared the bourn whither it might be tending. And, determined to distract himself, he hastily, at haphazard, stretched out his hand and took up another

letter. It was written in Italian, and enclosed within it was a note, which dropped down from his uncertain, almost nerveless fingers, as he extracted it from the envelope. He let the note lie, and began to read the letter:

'HOTEL DELL'ANGELO,
'SUBIACO, *September 22, 19* .

'MY DEAREST LISETTA,—I shall not see you again. You are the last person I shall ever write to. I came to Rome last night from Nice. I am ruined. You will think that is nothing new. This time, however, the ruin is final. I have no further resources. There is no way in which I can obtain the command of any money, though, if I could, I still believe the luck would turn, and I might win back all my losses and more. I am tired of it all, and have resolved to end it. And I should have ended it in Rome but for something that occurred to-day. As you know I am not a sentimentalist but rather a materialist. Nevertheless we are not always our own masters. Nor can we feel and act always according to the dictates of the brain. I love you, and have found myself quite unable to root out this love. And this love leads me to hate your enemies. The greatest of these is Cesare Carelli— —'

At this point Sir Theodore, yielding to an ungovernable impulse, picked up the note he had dropped on the table, and read:

'DEAR SIR THEODORE CANNYNGE,—I enclose a letter which I think must interest you. It explains itself, and needs no comment from me. But I will ask you specially to mark its date.—Yrs. sincerely, LISETTA MANCELLI.'

The date at the top of this note showed that it had been written on the day of the child's birth, the child having been born in the early morning.

Sir Theodore laid it down and went on reading the letter.

'The greatest of these is Cesare Carelli. When he became your lover I hated him. But since he abandoned you for Lady Cannynge I have loathed him.'

A torrent of red rushed over Sir Theodore's face. The letter shook in his hand. He made a movement as if to

throw it away, checked himself, laid it down, bent over the table with both hands on it, and read on to the end.

"To-day I happened to be near the Porta San Sebastiano when I saw Carelli go by in a motor towards the open country. He was driving himself at a tremendous rate. But I saw his face quite clearly. As you know I have not lived in the rooms at Monte Carlo for years without learning to judge minds accurately enough from the faces which often try to conceal them. The face of Carelli put me on the track of something. I knew Lady Cannynge was in Rome, and that her husband was in England. I connected the excitement and hurry of Carelli, his rapid departure from Rome, with her. Why? My instinct was at work. And my instinct was right. Almost directly after Carelli had disappeared I met a taxi-cab, on which was some luggage, going in the same direction as Carelli's motor. Inside was a tall woman. She was wrapped in a veil. But I thought, indeed I felt almost sure, that I detected Lady Cannynge. Then Lisetta, it occurred to me that possibly I might do you a last service, before getting out of this world, which refuses to offer me anything more worth the taking. I went into Rome, engaged a taxi-cab, and told the chauffeur to drive me out of the city by the Porta San Sebastiano, and to go on till I gave him further directions. When we were opposite to the flying ground at Centocelle I stopped him, and inquired of a man with a wine cart, who was coming in from the direction of Colonna, whether he had met a grey torpedo-shaped motor-car on the road. He told me he had, and that it was going much too fast and had smothered him with dust. I gave the fellow a little money and got out of him another piece of information. He had also met a taxi-cab with a tall lady in it, and luggage outside, and had been asked by the driver and the lady, if they were going right for Olevano Romano. The lady, he said, spoke well, but he was sure she was one of the English. Having ascertained what I wanted, I told my driver to take me to Olevano Romano. Not far from there I met a returning taxi-cab, stopped it, and, by the usual means, learnt from the driver enough to be *quite sure* that Carelli and Lady Cannynge are at this moment at Casa Truschi, the inn above Olevano on

the hill, and that they have gone there to stay the night. In order that I may not meet them by chance, or be known by them to be in the neighbourhood, I have come on here. But when night falls I shall return. What am I going to do? Something for you, Lisetta, and something also for myself. For even now I think of myself. I know Casa Truschi and the land about it. As a boy I was often there. I meant to make an end of things in Rome. I have changed my mind. When the night comes I shall go up the hill, and I shall die where these two must know of my death, where they shall be the first to find me, where they shall be involved in the publicity that will follow my end. There is a pergola just below the balcony of the room which they must occupy. That is the place I have chosen. A pistol shot, and their secrecy is blown to the winds. So, you will see, at the very end I shall serve you and strike those who have made you suffer, who have treated you, Lisetta Mancelli, with cruelty, indignity, treachery.

'Addio. I make no last protestations. You have helped me. You have paid debts for me; I shall pay something into your account to-night, and something into my own.

'MONTEBRUNO.'

Having finished the letter Sir Theodore got up from the writing-table. But he did not leave it. For several minutes he stood beside it with his hands upon the letter.

The date—the date! He was trying to make a calculation, but he was unable to make it. His brain was clouded, and there was a buzzing in his ears. Nevertheless he felt almost furiously obstinate. He would stand there till he was able to make that calculation. The blood had now retreated from his face, leaving a strange and hideous pallor which showed underneath the brown tint of the skin. But the exhausted feeling had left him. Although his brain for the moment was clouded his body felt strongly alive.

A very faint and distant cry disturbed the silence of the library. And immediately his mind was clear. He listened. The sound was not repeated. But he had known it for the cry of his child.

His child? He moved quickly away from the writing-table with the intention of going into the room which had

been turned into a nursery. But when he reached the door, and had opened it, he stopped. He felt that he dared not go to the child just then, till he had thought, considered, till he had recovered complete possession of himself, till he had arrived, perhaps, at some conclusion. And he left the door open and went back to the library.

Now he was able to make that calculation which, just before, had been impossible to him. And his face showed a greater pallor.

Yet he did not believe a word of all this. With contempt he told himself so. He repeated it to himself again and again.

His wife and Cesare Carelli! Why, they had scarcely known each other. They had been the merest acquaintances. And, apart from that, who that had ever really known Doloretta could for a moment suspect her of such an action? She rose up before his memory. It was as if he saw her standing in the room, with her large and wistful eyes, her almost sad lips and slightly down drawn brows. He thought of the nickname some had given her, Gazelle. He heard again the sound of her voice. How could such a woman commit such an action as this letter attributed to her? Why her whole being would shrink from the mere thought of it. Body and soul she would abhor it. And, besides, she had loved him. She had certainly loved him deeply, always.

Had not she?

Suddenly he remembered how often, before his going to Sicily, he and Dolores had been separated. He remembered the life at Frascati, his wife's departure to Como, her long stay in Rome alone later on in the almost deserted palace. He remembered his visits to England, his pre-occupation with the affairs of Edna Dengil, and with the children. Not for a moment, even now, did he blame himself. But he remembered that Dolores had declined to go on living at Frascati, and he remembered that she had been very often alone.

Had she been alone all that time?

He snatched at the letter again. He re-read it, forming every word with his lips. Montebruno had killed himself in that pergola at Casa Truschi. The whole Roman world

had wondered why. But no names had been mentioned in connection with his death. There had been no scandal. Nothing had ever been hinted of a woman at the inn that night. Why, after all, what did this letter show? Merely that Montebruno had thought that the woman who drove in a taxi-cab to the inn was Dolores. He had only seen her veiled. His assertion that, after speaking with the returning chauffeur, he was quite sure of the identity of this woman carried no conviction. How should a taxi-cab driver know? And, anyhow, those fellows will say anything for money. And Montebruno had given him money.

How dark the child's eyes were—black eyes!

It would be very easy to order a motor now, to go to Olevano Romano, to make inquiries. But what was the good, when he was sure, absolutely sure, that his dead wife was incapable of such an action? She hardly knew Carelli. She hardly knew him.

Sir Theodore repeated this to himself again and again, with a sort of desperate anger, which he believed was directed against a dead slanderer, Montebruno.

That Princess Manelli should send such a letter to one who was almost a stranger! He looked again at the date of her note. She had sent it when Dolores was alive, when there was no reason to suppose Dolores was in any danger of death.

Then Princess Manelli absolutely believed that Dolores had betrayed him. She had proved it by being content that he should confront his wife with the letter of Montebruno. She had proved it by allowing him to know of his own shame.

He began to pace his room.

If he had opened that letter when first it reached the palace! He could have taken it to his wife's room, he could have said to her, 'Here is a slander. Deny it, only deny it, and I will never think of it again. The letter shall be burnt and forgotten.'

Ill as she was she would have denied it. Even when she was at the point of death, when she had looked at him with those strangely stern eyes, when she had had no words for him, if he had told her of that slander she must have understood. Such an accusation would have recalled her spirit

from the remote region it had gained. She would have understood, have returned, have denied.

He remembered his arrival in Sicily.

How different Dolores had seemed to him in Sicily! While he had been away in England she had subtly changed. He had noticed it directly. And, that night in Sicily, when he took her in his arms, how she had cried!

Why had she cried like that?

Again the blood rushed to his face. If it were true! If his dead wife had really taken a lover! If—the terrible date flamed, as if written in fire, before his mind.

'Nurse Jennings!

He stood still. A memory had arrested his activity, the memory of his conversation with the nurse when he wished to take his wife out of Rome, believing that some weeks must elapse before the birth of the child. She had said the journey was impossible, and she had said, 'Everything is quite normal.' If the child that was then about to be born had been his, and if everything had been quite normal, then such a journey as he had proposed would not have been impossible. He had felt as if the nurse were trying to deceive him. He had even almost said so. His instinct had led him right. He was sure of it now, suddenly sure of it. Nurse Jennings had known before, long before, when the child must be born, and she had kept him in ignorance. She had not dared to tell him.

He turned sharply, went out of the library, traversed the green and red drawing-room and the adjoining chamber, and came into the hall. As he was about to go down the passage to the right, in search of Nurse Jennings, whose bedroom was there, he heard a slight noise and stopped. Some one was inserting a latchkey into his front door. He stood facing the door. The key turned, the door opened inwards, and Cesare Carelli stood before him, pale, hard, resolute, with unflinching eyes, the eyes of a man devoured by purpose, by the desperate will to act.

When he saw Sir Theodore he showed no surprise. He drew the key out of the keyhole and shut the door behind him.

The two men stood for a moment face to face in silence.

'How did you get possession of the key of my door?' last said Sir Theodore.

'Your wife gave it to me.'

'When?'

'On the night before you started for England last year.'

He paused. Sir Theodore looked at him in the eyes, and he continued in a low, hard voice:

'We had been dining together at Villa Medici. I brought her home. She gave me the key that I might open the door. And I have kept it ever since.'

He laid the key down on the hall table.

'That 's a lie,' said Sir Theodore. 'I was here that night.'

'I know. Here—asleep!'

'My wife was at home. I visited her room and heard her sleeping before I went to bed.'

'No. She was with me in the garden of Villa Medici till midnight.'

'I heard her sleeping.'

A look of contempt—or was it pity?—flitted across Cesare's face.

'Because you thought she must be,' he said.

'You dare to say ?'

'I came in with her that night.'

'You —' Sir Theodore made a slight movement forward, checked himself, and stood still.

'Against her will. I only stayed a few minutes.'

There was an unmistakable accent of truth in the voice. That, and the unexpectedness of the last words, evidently made on Sir Theodore an immense, and terrible, impression. The man who could say that, in that way, was a man of truth.

'She did not wish you to come in?'

'She did not wish me to come in, to be with her *that night*.'

Sir Theodore hesitated, with his eyes always fixed upon Cesare. Little drops of sweat burst out on his forehead. Twice he opened his lips and did not speak. At length, with a difficult effort, he said:

'What have you come here for now? It is not to see her. She is dead.'

'I have come to claim my child.'

Again the silence fell between them. In it there took

place a fearful resurrection. The potential father, stricken down in Sir Theodore for the moment by the illness and death of Dolores, rose as if from the grave at the last words, 'My child,' with an almost wild-beast desire to spring upon and make an end of the man who had uttered them. A rage of possession took hold upon him. He had lost the mother. Was he going to lose the child? Was he going to be left with nothing? At that moment he no longer debated the fearful question. He no longer asked himself whether or not the child was his! The child had been born in his home, of his wife, and it should be his. He would close his ears to evidence and his mind to reason. He would not argue, listen or see. He would repel and he would hold. The child should own him as father. He would take the child to England, or to some distant land, where no evil tongues would ever whisper a doubt as to his paternity. Even the fury of jealousy and of humiliation sank away at that moment from his heart. Even Dolores was forgotten. Every other feeling was trampled down by the determination to keep possession of the child.

He took up the latchkey and put it into his pocket.

'You talk like a madman,' he said. 'I must ask you to go.'

Cesare stood looking at him.

'You must give up my child.'

'Go.'

'Do you want evidence? I was with your wife at Olevano Romano on the night of the twenty-second of last September, the night Montebruno killed himself there.'

'Go!' repeated Sir Theodore.

But Cesare drew out a letter-case and took from it a folded sheet of note-paper.

'If you do not believe me look at that.'

He held towards Sir Theodore Princess Manelli's note of warning to Dolores.

'Your wife sent that to me directly she received it. You will see that she has written some words on it.'

Sir Theodore read the note and tore it up.

'Go!' he said.

'You must give up my child.'

'I shall not part with the child.'

'Do you still believe the child is yours?'

Sir Theodore clenched his hands.

'I shall not part with the child,' he reiterated, doggedly.

'I will have it!' said Cesare.

A wicked look came into his face.

'She took me and threw me away, as if I and my love were nothing,' he said; and now his voice was shaken as the memory of his wrong boiled up in him. 'If she had lived I don't know what I should have done. It's difficult for a man to fight against a woman. But she's gone, and we men are left. Before she went she gave a child to me—to *me*.' His voice suddenly rose, and he struck his breast violently. 'Not to you. D'you hear? And I'll have what she gave me, what belongs to me.'

He moved forward violently, then stood still.

'Ah!' he said.

He looked down the passage on the right. There was a slight rustling sound and Nurse Jennings appeared, dressed to go away. Before she could speak Cesare was beside her, and had seized her by the arm.

'You knew! She told you!' he said. 'Tell him who is the father of the child.'

Nurse Jennings looked at Sir Theodore without speaking.

Under the steady eyes of the woman, eyes that were still red with weeping for his dead wife, something within him seemed to collapse. All the doggedness melted, was swept away, under a torrent of conviction, of humiliation, of despair. He felt impotent, no more a man, incapable of further assertion of any right—if he possessed it—incapable of any struggle, of any further resistance. His head dropped. He looked suddenly years older.

An electric bell sounded. Carlino appeared, staring with his anxious eyes. He went to the front door and opened it. Mechanically Sir Theodore looked up and saw on the threshold Lady Sarah. Slowly he went to her and took her hand. Holding it tightly he turned towards the nurse and Cesare.

'Let her take the child!' he said in a loud, unsteady voice. 'If she will—let her—let her—she has told me—she told me, yesterday—she cares very much for little children.'

He dropped Lady Sarah's hand, and left them. He went

into the dead woman's room, and sank down on the sofa. He felt terribly tired, finished.

How long he sat there alone he did not know. But presently he heard a knock. It was reiterated, but he did not reply to it. And at last the door was opened and Nurse Jennings came in. She shut the door behind her and came to the sofa.

'Sir Theodore!' she said.

He did not speak or look up.

'Sir Theodore!'

She sat down very near to him.

'I am going away, but I couldn't go without speaking to you.'

'Will she take the child?' he said, without moving or looking at her. "Is she going to take the child?'

'Yes, I think she will. She loves little children.'

He shivered.

'Then—then there's nothing more to say.'

'Yes, there's just this. I don't want to hurt you, but I must say it. For I feel I owe it to her. All this has come about because she loved you too much, more than a man deserves to be loved, I think, and you'll forgive me!'

'Loved me too much!' he muttered. 'Loved me too much!'

'Yes. One night, when you were living at Frascati, I was alone with her here, and she told me—as good as told me. She had been playing the piano, and she quite broke down. "I've always been pretending," she said. And with that she cried as if her heart was near to breaking. And at last she said, "I want to have a child!"'

Sir Theodore lifted his head and looked at the nurse.

'I said, "Many women want that." "Not like me," she said. "I can't bear it, not having a child." And then she said, and her voice—well, it really was terrible—"I *need* to have a child!" And then, presently, she told me—she told me—'

The voice of the nurse shook.

'What?' said Sir Theodore. 'What?'

'She told me she needed the child for you.'

'For me?'

'Yes. She said: "Because I haven't given my husband a child he doesn't care for me any more." And last of all she said: "He will never care for me again unless I can give him a child. He blames me because we have no child. He doesn't say it, but he makes me feel it, every day and all the time." And then she cried again, and let me know how terribly she cared for you, and how terribly she felt it, your being always with that family. And at the last I said——'

'What?' asked Sir Theodore, in a strange voice, an awakened voice.

'I said, "I should like to bring it home to your husband what he's made you suffer."'

There was a long silence. Then the nurse got up.

'She made me give my promise on honour never to tell you. Well, I've broken it, and I had to. And this I will say, Sir Theodore, that never was there a man loved better than you have been, nor one that understood the way of a woman's love less than you. And this I will say, too, that whatever she may have done the real reason of its doing was you. Pretty well all the big things women do are done for men, I believe. Foolish it may be, but I suppose it's human nature. We are made so, and must put up with it.'

She paused. Tears were running down her cheeks. He sat gazing at her without a word.

'Good-bye, Sir Theodore.'

She pulled out her handkerchief.

With an effort he got up. He did not take her hand, but she took his.

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'But I had to tell you, promise or no promise. I felt I owed it to her.'

'Yes, you owed it to her.'

'And through it all, to my [illegible], she never was bad. No, she was good right up to the end. She was, she was!'

'She was better than I!' he answered.

The nurse gripped his hand and left him.

As she went out of the room he sank down again on the sofa, and leaned forward, with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands.

'Better than I!' he repeated. 'Better than I!'

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Printed at
The Edinburgh Press,
9 and 11 Young Street.